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THE
LAST RECRUIT OF CLARE'S

*Being Passages from the Memoirs of Anthony Dillon
Chevalier of St. Louis, and Late Colonel of
Clare's Regiment in the Service
of France*

BY

S. R. KEIGHTLEY

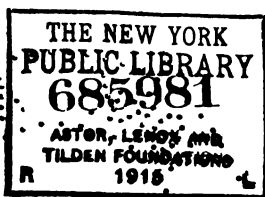
AUTHOR OF "THE CAVALIERS"
"THE CRIMSON SIGN" ETC.

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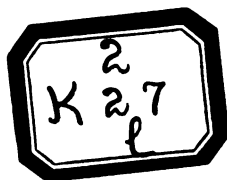
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Part 1

AMONG THE EVENING SHADOWS





THE LAST RECRUIT OF CLARE'S

PART I

AMONG THE EVENING SHADOWS

My dead comrades, exiles and heroes, I drink to your memory!

By the walls of Tournay, on the dark ridge of Fontenoy, on the vine-clad hills where the broad Rhine rolls seaward, you sleep the sleep of heroes, waiting for the reveille blown by the trumpet of the Angel of the Resurrection. We shall meet again, my dead comrades. Meanwhile your memory is green in my heart; your faces are clear before my eyes; and your songs—the songs of the camp and the dear old Fatherland—are still the music of my dreams. My dreams, alas! From that day when the black ship carried us with breaking hearts by the sca-wall of Innisfallen, and France, our royal foster-mother, took us to her splendid bosom, we waited, wept, and fought together. We went laughing up the deadly breach

—the death-black jaws with the blood-red lips; with fierce joy we leaped upon the line of bayonets and tore the serried ranks asunder. We feasted in trenches and made our banqueting-chamber in the courts of Death; but we never forgot the land that gave us birth. Our hearts were still across the western wave—our hopes and prayers were still with Ireland; and every blow we dealt was struck in memory of ancient wrongs.

'Twas not the gold of Louis bought the swords that reaped the crimson harvest of a hundred fields. The gallant Irish gentlemen who marched with Saxe and fought with Noailles cared little for the treasury of France. In the veins of many a humble soldier ran the blood of kings.

My dead comrades, gentlemen of the Irish Brigade, I drink to your memory!

The evening shadows are gathering round my steps, and my feet are drawing nigh the House of Rest. I almost alone with living voice can answer "Here!" when the muster-roll is called, and tell the wondering listeners how we stayed the tide of war on Fontenoy. "Remember Limerick!" I hear that cry yet; it thrills me like a trumpet blown on the field of honor.

The red artillery flashed from the dark woods of Vezon; along the stubborn squares the unwavering bayonets gleamed; the sable wings of Death

had darkened the sun in heaven. The regiments of Normandie and Des Vaisseaux were not the foremost. Like wolf-dogs hot upon the panting quarry the men of Dillon and of Clare, of Roth and Lally, leaped laughing up that hill of death. They hardly paused an instant where the gleaming line of bayonets waited to receive them, and Fontenoy was won.

Sometimes, sitting in the gardens of the Luxembourg, my old comrades and myself fight our ancient battles once again; but when we talk of Fontenoy we rise to our feet and bare our heads, with a prayer for the souls of our gallant friends dead on the field of glory. Our steps are feeble and our heads are white. Now one and now another comes no more into the winter sunshine beneath the southern wall. Soon the last of the rear-guard, old and broken, will join their comrades, and cross the dark waters that roll without terror at our feet. You call me even now, my friends and comrades; I hear your kindly voices, and my heart is fain to go.

Sometimes, here in my little room that looks across the Seine, sitting lonely in the shadows and silence, a host of recollections crowd upon me from the past—friends whom I laughed and drank and played with; lips I have loved and kissed; foes towards whom I have no malice now; carousal, midnight sortie, stricken field. Memory takes

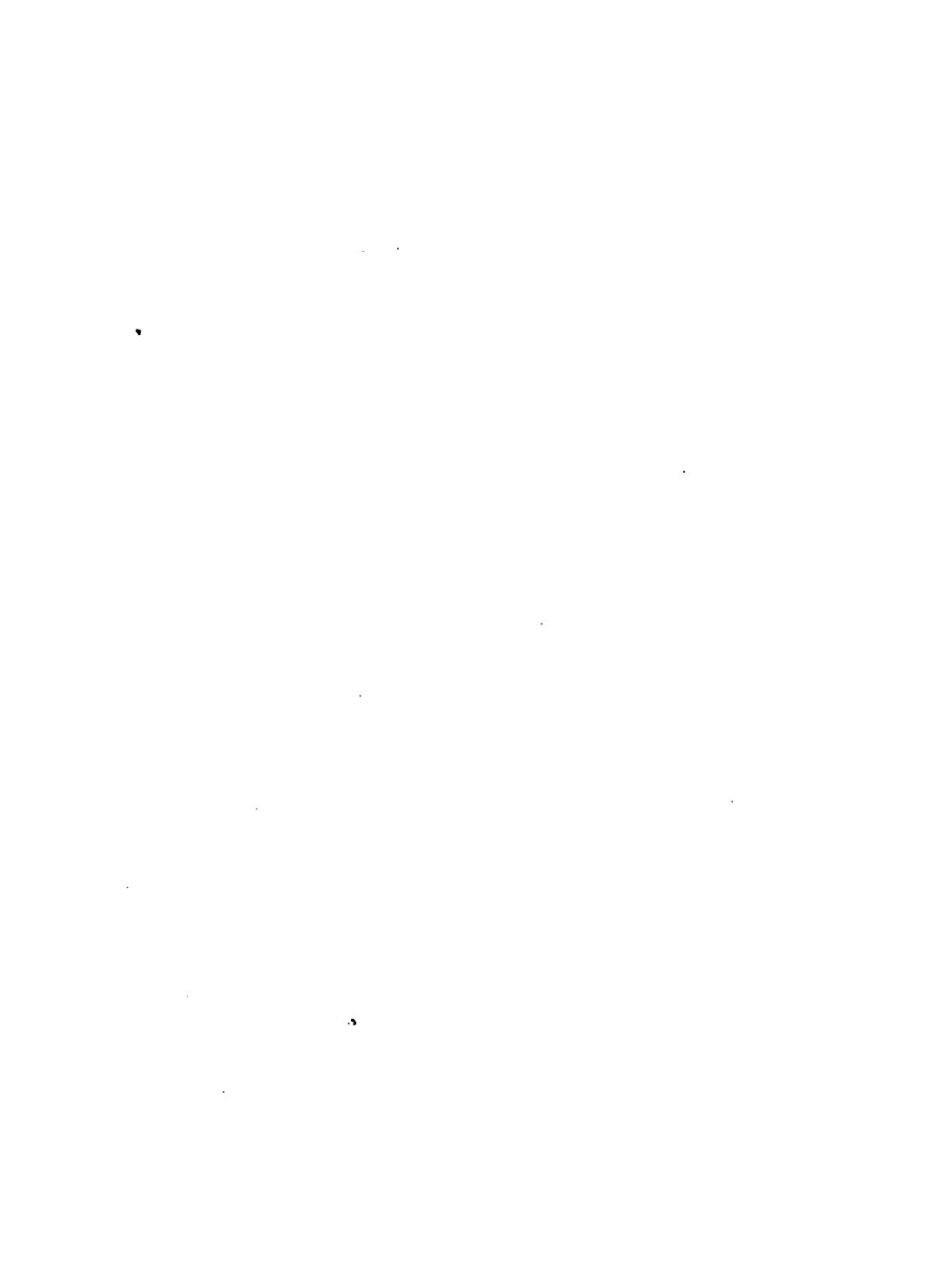
me by the hand, and leads me step by step along the broken road I traversed. The ghosts are all about me, with their living eyes and voices—the ghosts of Youth and Happiness. And even I am young. And then, alas! I waken to the distant tumult of the city and the echo of passing footsteps, and the golden fields grow dark with shadows, and night comes down, that leaves me still the star of hope.

This will not do. I hardly know what I have written, or how, for my heart has grown so full of the sadness of recollection that feeling, and not thought, has guided my pen and shaped my words. I have long purposed to write out the history of my life, and its many vicissitudes of good and evil fortune. Perhaps no man has ever borne a greater share of both with more serenity than I, and I can now look back upon the record of my life with cheerfulness and pardonable pride. But it is another thing to set forth that record in fitting and appropriate language, and follow every scene in the drama of my life to the rounded and completed whole. I would willingly do that, but I fear I have not the skill. I was brought up in a school where the sword and not the writer's pen was put in the hands of the growing lad. But you must not imagine I have not sufficient knowledge for a gentleman. Though I may not have acquired the tricks and graces of style possessed

by the makers of books, there are still certain matters that I think I can set forth clearly. These are the episodes that stand out like landmarks on the path that I have journeyed, and it is these that I propose to set out here. Perhaps they may have interest for others; at least they will form a page out of a living book, and go to show that Anthony Dillon, though a mere soldier of fortune, hated none without a cause, envied none his good-fortune, and followed the voice of honor and truth like a lover and a gentleman.

Part II

THE LAST RECRUIT OF CLARE'S



PART II

THE LAST RECRUIT OF CLARE'S

WITHOUT doubt Van Helmont had a lion's heart, and the gentlemen of the Irish Brigade adored courage. Therefore we drank to his health—the health of our enemy—sitting knee-deep in the mud of the trenches, while O'Rorke, the drummer, played the "White Cockade" on the ramparts, and the guns roared with their devil's laughter from the heights of Rayonville. For nearly a month the dark line of our bayonets had been drawing nearer to the walls—the embrace of a lover whose kiss is death. But what then? This waiting would have an end to-morrow, and the regiments of Clare and Dorrington would be the first to pluck the blood-red rose of honor where it grew beneath the wings of Death in the yawning breach before us. 'Tis no great ambition to leave your bones to whiten on the glaxis or be trodden in a pit with a thousand nameless comrades, but none the less the brigade set up a shout of joy when we heard the king had granted our request to lead the attack.

Our colonel himself brought the news; I think he had been dining with his majesty. He had a pleasant smile on his face, and a light in his eyes that danced like sunshine on a sword-blade.

"Gentlemen, the king has graciously accepted our invitation. We entertain him at breakfast in the town-hall of Rayonville. *Vive le Roi!*"

"Faith, and I hope we may all be there with the best of appetites," growled our major, Maurice O'Kelly, who was the bravest man in the army; but the great shout drowned his ill-omened prayer, and our gallant fellows took up the cry from one end of the trenches to the other.

For myself, the heart of Anthony Dillon danced to the music of hope that breathes so softly in the ears of youth. The ink was hardly dry upon the commission that had made me sublieutenant in the Irish Regiment of Clare. The old homestead by the broad Shannon was tenanted by the owls and bats; my race, that drew its lineage from the loins of kings, had nothing but its memories; and I, the last Dillon of Fortgale, had eleven louis d'or in my pocket, invincible courage in my heart, and the sword of my father, who fell by the glorious walls of Limerick. That was all my fortune, but enough for honor. Irish gentlemen in the service of France—and there was none better born or more courageous than myself—had carried the baton of a maréchal. They had be-

come the right hand of kings and splendid officers of state. They could not live for Ireland; they had lived and died for France.

While I lay in the trenches, waiting for the first tap of the drum, my waking thoughts were busy with the future. Hope drew its fairy pictures in the glowing colors of love and glory. I remember—'tis fifty years ago—I drew my sword from the scabbard and pressed the blade to my lips with a prayer that I might prove myself worthy of the name it had kept unsullied. I was only twenty-three, and 'twas my first battle, but I think in all soberness I did not pray in vain. Anthony Dillon, chevalier of St. Louis, late colonel of Clare's, has lived, and, if it so please a kind Heaven, will die a gentleman. When my old comrades—alas! there are few of them left now—have laid me in the narrow home of rest, they will look down on my coffin and say: "Heaven rest his gallant spirit! He will face God like a man. He never turned his back on friend or foe." And that will be no lying epitaph. But then the wide world was before me. I feared it no more than the dancer fears the minuet. Fortune and I were lovers.

I shall never forget that morning when the two regiments of the Irish Brigade took Rayonville. With the first tap of the rolling drum I was upon my feet in the cold gray of dawn, with the wet

night clinging to its skirts. Dorrington's formed upon the right, Clare's upon the left. They fell into their places in unbroken silence, the black lift of bayonets looming like a wall. Not a man of them spoke a word, and their faces looked a ghastly white in the pallid twilight—a long line of white faces behind the row of steel. I, myself, felt that I could not speak, for the last silence seemed to have overtaken me.

Upon the slopes of death towards Rayonville the mist still clung in swathes and folds, but lifting somewhat as we formed. Then we saw the dark walls with the jagged rent, through which we were to pass. I shivered when I stood at the wing of the column waiting for the word. Eternity seemed to live in the beat of a minute. My teeth chattered in my head; the cold seemed to catch my heart.

"Ye'll be warrm enough in a minute, sor," said Mahony, my sergeant, who, I think, had been watching me under his bushy eyebrows. He had fought at Cremona, had played at dice with death for thirty years, and had the reputation of being the greatest blackguard and best soldier in the brigade. "I used to feel the could meself, but hell-fire wouldn't warrm me now. Holy Virgin! there's the music that I like to hear come at last."

In an instant the gray morning was lighted, as

it seemed, by a thousand tongues of flame, and the thunder of the artillery smote the air with what, to my unaccustomed ear, sounded like the crash of doom. Then the loud call rolled down the ranks, and, with the wild cry that still stirred our Irish hearts, we leaped to the assault. We left fifty men on the glacis who would never answer to the muster-roll again, and fifty more in the fosse that was churned into crimson froth, and ran red with the bright blood of Kerry and Kildare. I remember, as a man remembers last night's dream, clambering through the breach, and the gleam of steel behind the black-lipped guns. But we never yielded a foot of the ground we had gained. The king should breakfast with us, after all. We fought shoulder to shoulder like brothers drinking out of one cup, at first with hardly room to thrust and parry, but soon with room enough. The red tide that had rolled up the glacis seemed stayed for a moment in the death-strewn breach, foaming and churning; then it rolled on, and there was nothing more to stop us.

War is no doubt the game of kings, but what of the pieces whom they move? It was many a day before I forgot the sack of Rayonville. We fought down the narrow streets, with the flames roaring over our heads, and the shrieks of the women mingled with the hoarse shouts of the fighting men. There was no reverence for age or

sex, for the wild fury of war had transformed brave men into beasts.

I would not willingly dwell upon this picture. Meanwhile I gained the square of the cathedral, and here there was a space clear of the sulphurous smoke that filled the narrow streets through which we had fought our way. The church was filled with women, but even in the house of God there was no sanctuary in this hour of madness.

The light had now grown clear and broad. There was a tall house at the corner of the square round which a group of men was gathered, and one higher than the rest, bareheaded and with a weapon in his hand. As I drew nearer I recognized the voice of Mahony, sergeant of Clare's. He stood upon the stone steps, his gigantic form drawn to its full height, and his bayonet red and dripping. A crowd of furious musketeers swayed and surged round him, alternately pressing forward and hanging back, but never venturing within the deadly reach of his weapon. I saw the body of a woman lying at his feet, her bare arms thrown out and the bosom of her white dress dyed a bright red. Almost covered by the woman's body was a child, whom she had evidently been carrying when she was struck down. For one brief instant I saw the infant beating the mother's white face with his little hands as though

to awaken her, and then I rushed forward to the assistance of my countryman. But he stood confronting his assailants with a contemptuous sneer, his eyes blazing and his gray mustache drawn up and showing his white teeth. He caught sight of me when I came up, but he never moved nor seemed to see me.

"Come on, messieurs of the Maison du Roi!" he cried. "I'm keeping the door meself. If you're ready for your breakfast I'll do the carving, but it's yourselves won't loike the entertainment—I'm hungry and tired, and they'll tell ye in Clare's me temper is none of the best. For the love av God, don't kape me too long, or I'll have to walk down an' hurry ye up. Here's six inches of could steel an' ten thousand years' av purgatory to the first av ye that thrembles an eyelash. Be me sowl, ye're only a pack of scrambling cowards, afther all, an' Terence Mahony's a long road from home."

The language of this sergeant of my regiment was not such as I can write down in its entirety, nor would I wrong the memory of a brave soldier now long since with God. But I could see that he had little need of my assistance even had I been of service. His bold and careless bearing, his colossal stature and immense strength, had already damped the ardor of his assailants, and they were willing to seek an easier prey. As I

came quite near they fell back, and we were left standing alone together on the steps, with the broken rack of battle streaming past us, and the dead woman at our feet.

He lowered his musket and saluted me as gravely as though we had been upon the parade-ground. Then he bent down over the woman and lifted her head with its soft shimmer of golden curls falling loosely to the ground. She was very young, but wore a heavy wedding-ring upon her finger—evidently a lady of some rank and of a most engaging beauty. I watched the grizzled veteran bending over her and placing his horny hand within the delicate lace that covered her bosom. We neither of us spoke, filled as we were with the pity of the tragedy. Then he let her head fall, and took up the child, that was now crying piteously in his arms.

"Her sweet sowl is wid the angels av God," he said. "I was too late, yer honor, an' there's nothing there but the clay."

He drew the back of his hand across his eyes. There was a long pause, and then he silently, almost reverently, pressed his white mustache against the child's curls.

"'Tis his innocent heart will rue this bloody day, sor. 'Tis a poor exchange he has made av this swate lady for an ould reprobate av a wet-nurse like Terence Mahony."

"What will you do with the child?" I said, looking at him in wonder.

"My share av the plundher av Rayonville. If nobody turns up with a betther claim to the white-headed gossoon than meself, 'tis a brigadier av Clare's I'll make av him. Shure an he'll be the good fairy av Terence Mahony."

"It won't do, Mahony," I said; "you can't keep the child."

"I can thry at any rate, sor. I think I know what's throublin' you, but ye can rest aisy in your mind. More by the token we're a rough lot in Clare's, and it's meself is none av the sweetest av them what with the dhrink an' the cards an' the bad temper that was me own father's before me; but here's the shaughraun will bring us the good-luck, an' maybe a quiet corner in glory to an ould blackguard like meself."

"We must find the child's friends," I said, seeing him speak with so much earnestness. "I will ask the colonel to make some inquiry; you can keep the child till then."

"Your honor can do what he plases, an' so can my Lord Clare, but divil a friend will he ever find but meself—the good saints kape his blessed heart! I've promised his mother I'd look afther the boy, an', in spite av Louis Quinze himself, I'll thry an' make a man av him."

He saw the look of astonishment on my face.

"You see, I wanted a thrinket or two by way as a token, an' had come to the corner, when I heard the poor lady cry out in her throuble. We don't grow soft-hearted marchin' with Saxe, an' maybe I wouldn't have minded—the Lord turn an' alther me!—but for the baby. I had a white-headed boy meself wance in Kilmahone, an' the Lord put me in moind av him then and there. She had come out on the steps—makin' for the chapel, I'm thinkin'—an' the bloody villains wanted the satchel that's lying at your feet. She had it over her arm, but she never moinded that a bit—'twas the choild she was thinkin' av. An' she rached him out to me wid a look in her face that would have touched the heart av a granite stone. I was too late—wan av them stabbed her—that wan at the foot av the steps—an' I caught the choild as she fell. Ye saw how I tuk him out av her arms, an' it was then that I said to meself, 'Come rain or shine, wet or dhry, I'll be father an' mother to ye, an' thry an' make the rough world smooth for your tendher feet.' The good God watch between us if I don't kape the promise I have made."

I could only look at Mahony in astonishment. He was certainly the last man in the regiment from whom I should have expected such a display of feeling, or whom I should have chosen as the guardian and protector of a tender child.

For years he had been called "Old Blazes" by the men of Clare's, and I knew that he deserved his sobriquet. His capacity for drinking was proverbial, his temper the terror of the recruits, but a better soldier never handled his manual, and a braver never faced the lightning of the guns. He had brought the scar on his cheek from Cremona, and his limp from Ramillies; he was the first through the breach at Rayonville, and could charge a map of Europe with the battles he had fought. And now, when I saw him with the child held lovingly in his arms, and his rugged face shining with the soft light of pity that transformed its homeliness into something almost beautiful, I could hardly believe my eyes. It was clear that he had been touched, in some marvellous way, beyond words; that the tragic death of the girl-mother, and the hapless fate of the innocent child, had filled his heart with tenderness to overflowing. He made no attempt to disguise his emotions. He was not ashamed of the tears upon his weather-beaten cheeks. In some curious way the child was responsive to the tenderness of his protector, for he threw one little arm over his shoulder, and held up his lips to the grim face that looked lovingly down on him.

"The crayture knows me already," Mahony said; "maybe he thinks I'm the holy St. Vincent himself, an', troth, it's the same I'll be to him an'

no other. Ye'll have to consint whether ye will or no, sor, for never a friend will the little gentleman foind from this dark day but meself. But there's wan thing ye can do—there's thrinkets an' jewels in the bag—I heard the clink av them—an' shure they'll be a fortune to him when he comes into his own, and maybe get him a friend or two when I'm not here to look afther him. 'Tis the poor paymasther I'd be entoirely, an' ye had betther lave them with the colonel with the best respects av Terence Mahony and the last recruit of Clare's."

"I'll do that at any rate, Mahony," I said; "and the mother—" He looked at me reproachfully.

"She was swate and tendher as the May hawthorn in the boreen at Kilmahone," he said, looking down at the white heap at his feet. "A poor father I'd be to the boy if his blessed mother hadn't Christian burial, and a mass or two for the innocent sowl av her. You can lave me now, sor, and some av the bhoys av Clare's, when they've done with their rampagin' and thievin', will do what I want with them."

His majesty did not breakfast with us, after all; but my Lord Clare and his officers dined very sumptuously in the Hôtel de Ville with M. van Belmont, to whom many graceful compliments were paid upon his courageous and gallant defence. M. d'Argenson, who was present, spoke

many pretty things concerning our regiment, which were received with great enthusiasm; but for myself, I think, the vacant places at the table affected me more than the eulogies upon our courage and the general congratulation. The brave O'Kelly was lying dead upon the counterscarp; Eugene Dillon, and Fergus O'Brien, of the princely house of Tirlough, had fallen in the breach; and O'Mara, the troubadour of the regiment, would never set another song to the dear old airs of our fatherland. These things affected me then; in a year or two I was more at home in the shifting scenes of life and death.

When the company broke up I found an opportunity to speak privately with my Lord Clare, to whom I was remotely related on the distaff side. He was greatly interested in my story, for Mahony, notwithstanding his failings, was a prime favorite with his officers, and he promised to make such inquiries as he was able. My lord smiled when I told him how gravely Mahony regarded his charge, and how seriously his heart seemed set upon adopting him.

"No, no, my dear Anthony," my lord said, with his hand leaning familiarly on my shoulder, "it would never do, even should the child never find his friends. I fear the quarters his majesty assigns to the regiment of Clare, in these bustling days, would prove an awkward playground, and a

vieux moustache like Mahony an extraordinary preceptor of youth. 'Tis a most ridiculous fancy."

"None the less, your lordship will find it hard to separate them."

"Perhaps I may," my lord answered, laughing good-naturedly, as was his custom. "In the meantime I shall set inquiry on foot, and in the afternoon will visit the nursery in your company, if you will make it convenient to attend me there. By that time I am afraid the guardian will be none too sober."

But I was not of quite the same mind as my lord.

A part of the regiment was quartered in the Church of St. Geneviève, a fine old church which stands at the back of the Hôtel de Ville, and it was here that my lord and myself came in the afternoon. Lord Clare was received with a cheer which shook the banners hanging in the dusky arches, and brought the light to his kind and handsome face. No man was ever more beloved, and no man ever deserved that affection better. He raised his hat with a courteous bow, and walked quietly up the aisle, I following close behind. As we came up there was a momentary silence, and then we heard the sound of soft and kindly laughter, and a rich voice rolling out the words:

"Come all ye noble gentlemen, and lords of high degree,
And tell me if a handsomer ye ever yet did see,
Of cavalerie or infantrie, or sthrappin' grenadiers,
Than Bou-Bou, wance of Rayonville, the new recruit
of Clare's."

A small group wholly absorbed was standing round the altar steps, and Mahony was seated in the centre with the child laughing gayly on his knees, and pulling the old soldier's grizzled mustache. I do not know what tricks they had been engaged in, but the men were clapping their hands, and calling one another to admire the boy's sturdy activity. My lord turned round to me with a smile on his face, and I stepped forward.

"The colonel has come to see you, Mahony," I said, quietly.

The men fell back as though ashamed of the weakness they had been exhibiting, and Mahony leaped to his feet, standing to attention with a grave salute.

"Yes, my colonel."

His rugged face showed no sign of feeling. The child at his feet plucked his skirts to attract his attention, but he never moved a rigid muscle. He was again the impassive thing of iron, with the help of which his Most Christian Majesty won his battles.

"Terence Mahony of Kilmahone," says my lord, and I saw the quiet sparkle in his eye.

"'Tis not the first time your lordship has called me that same." And again the sergeant gravely saluted his commanding officer.

"I am told you were the first man through the breach this morning. This will not do. You never give the young fellows a chance."

"'Tis all the fault of your lordship, if I may make so bould."

"Pray, how am I to blame?"

"Shure, it's the bad example that your lordship sets to the regiment."

"Well, well, we must mend that, sergeant," answered my lord, evidently pleased and flattered by the insidious compliment. "We are both old enough to know better. The old country had no need to blush for the boys of Clare's this morning, Terence."

"That's God's truth anyhow, me lord. It was a beautiful scrimmage entirely, an' the ould land was well in the front av it. 'Tis the regular dhrill does it, afther all, yer honor."

"And the old fellows to set them a bad example—don't forget that, Mahony."

"It will be hard to forget that same while yer lordship's to the fore. But there's wan thing the regiment—" He hesitated, and began to play nervously with the skirt of his

tunic. My lord and myself knew what was coming.

"Don't ask too much, Mahony. It would be hard to refuse anything after Rayonville."

"But this is not much, sor; 'tis only a thrifle—only—only three feet an' a bit, be the same more or less." He bent down and lifted the child upon his shoulders, and the boy sat there smiling, with one hand held out to my lord, and the other clutching the white head of the old soldier. It was a pretty picture—that of the two in the quiet shadow of the church—and for a moment we were all quite quiet.

"Why, what is this?"

"The first of the new levy, me lord; I've 'listed him meself. Shure, I thought that Mr. Anthony had tould ye the way av it."

"I remember Mr. Anthony did say something. But what would you have me do?"

"Just show yerself the tendher-hearted gentleman that ye are. Put his name on the roll of the regiment, an' give the gossoon a chance."

"It won't do, Mahony; it won't do. We must find his friends."

"'Tis himself has made four hundred an' fifty this blessed day, an' sorra betther will he ever find in this world. He knows us already, me lord, an' can march to the sound av the dhrum like a tam-bour major. Can't ye, Bou-Bou? There's not a

finer pair av legs outside the kingdom av Kerry. Shure an' yer lordship wouldn't have us turn our backs on a drame av the mornin' like that. 'Tis for the honor av the regiment."

"I have already spoken to M. van Belmont. If that fails we shall see."

"Then we have got a new private in Clare's, an' it's meself will see he is no disgrace to the regiment. I knew yer lordship wouldn't turn away the good-luck. Salute his lordship, me son, an' tell him yer name."

The child, who seemed taken by my lord's kind eyes and smiling face, held out his hands, and cried "Bou-Bou" in his soft treble, while my lord, visibly affected, took him from the shoulder of his protector and kissed him tenderly. His head was bent over the laughing boy and his lips were moving; I am sure a prayer had passed through the gate of heaven for the orphan and for the rest of her soul whose loving heart should have been his harbor of refuge.

"'Tis a hard world for the young feet to travel, Mahony."

"Sure, me lord, we'll thry an' sthrew it wid roses for the baby," answered Mahony. "There's not an O'Brien in the regiment wouldn't give him his head already, though, glory be to God, they're empty av raison as nuts."

Mahony's words came true ; Bou-Bou found five hundred friends. When the novelty wore off, and the child became a familiar figure in the camp, the first sudden flash of pity and enthusiasm settled down into a steady glow of pride and affection. It was a curious thing to see the way in which they treated the child of their adoption. They sang him the cradle-songs of the old land across the sea ; they told him quaint stories of fairy and banshee, caught on the hill-side and redolent of the heather and the bracken ; they drank his health at the mess, and called to him where he rode—now on the shoulders of one, now on the shoulders of another—at the head of the column. He took part in their games ; he lightened their labors by his innocent prattle and childish laughter. They were rough and hard to hold—the men of Clare's—but after the coming of the child the camp was quieter, and the office of the provost-marshal became almost a sinecure. The Brigadier, for so they familiarly named him, exercised a wonderful influence over their rough spirits, and I think the sermons preached by his childish voice had more weight with them than those of Father Bonaventure Nolan himself. But upon none was the change so marked as upon Mahony. In an especial and peculiar way he became the guardian of the child. He watched over him with a tenderness and solicitude touching to

see. The boy slept at night with his head pillowed on the sergeant's breast, and learned to call him Father Terry with that familiar coquetry used by children towards those they love. I have seen them sitting by the bivouac fire, their heads bent together over the one book, for Mahony was a scholar and proud of his accomplishment, the child following the forefinger of his instructor, and calling out the letters with his clear young voice.

Once he fell dangerously ill—that was in Namur—and Mahony never left his bedside for a moment, taking the place of the mother he had lost, and ministering to his wants with a sleepless and untiring love. When the boy recovered and walked out again into the sunshine holding the sergeant's hand, the joy was great and universal, and you would have thought we had gained another victory.

It was at this time that M. de Guyon, of the Regiment des Vaisseaux, lost his life. Some officers of Clare's had been dining at a public table when the conversation happened to turn upon the little soldier. M. de Guyon, who was present, thought it an excellent subject for his wit—we had been dining freely—and made some coarse jest which the occasion did not warrant. Charles O'Brien, the same who afterwards fell full colonel at Malines, gravely rose from his seat and crossed the room.

"Monsieur has insulted my little comrade," he said, with a solemn bow, "who cannot yet defend his own honor. You wear a sword, sir, and there is a fine moon."

"With infinite pleasure," M. de Guyon answered, pleasantly. "Pray give me time to finish this bottle of wine—'tis the wine of Ai, regarding which I am in perfect agreement with his majesty—I am then at your service."

No more was said till M. de Guyon rose.

"I am now at the disposal of monsieur. We shall have the other bottle when we return, Jacques."

But he never came back to the Tête de Mouton. We trooped out into the moonlight, and, passing through the narrow streets, found a quiet space on the ramparts. It was all over in five minutes—M. de Guyon was lying with his face to the stars, and O'Brien, grave and silent, was wiping the red stain from his sword. They said afterwards the quarrel was about a woman—men naturally fight about a woman—and no one doubted. But this is the true version of the story.

Meanwhile the child grew strong and sturdy, with a most engaging manner, and a beauty almost girlish, though the Brigadier had a great heart. The colonel, who had come to love him—as who did not?—had had a little uniform made for him—scarlet faced with green—and sure a

quainter figure was never seen than that the child presented. Indeed, he had become a part of the regiment. He had intertwined himself round all our hearts—a little bit of human tenderness fallen upon our wild and stormy lives. He knew the name of every man in Clare's, and had learned to play the "White Cockade" as well as O'Rorke himself.

'Twas a strange life for a child—this moving scene of march and battle, with the hand of Death busy among us, and the wild ruin of war flaming and cracking round us. These were bustling days for France, when the genius of Saxe crowned the arms of his majesty with glory; nor need I say that wherever the golden lilies flew the Irish Brigade won honor and renown, and promotion came rapidly in the Regiment of Clare. Yet the men were accustomed to say that Mahony's shaughraun had brought the good-luck, for the tide of victory set in with Rayonville and did not stay with Fontenoy. Certainly the shaughraun was familiar with march and siege and battle, and with the brown-faced men who trudged through Europe with their muskets on their weary shoulders. He knew no other life. The camp was his playground, rough soldiers his playfellows, and I am sure his was the happiest existence in the world.

The allies under Cumberland and the Prince de

Waldeck were before us fifty thousand strong. At midnight the order had come to march, and we had quietly broken up our camp, making a flank movement towards Antoin. It was a night in May as I trudged at the head of my company—I was then a captain in Clare's—and a light rain had laid the brown dust that lay thick upon the roads. There was no one spoke as we marched, only some one in the ranks sang "Garryowen" in a rich, mellow voice that carried me back to Fortgale and the thrushes piping in the limes.

Before the dawn broke we had taken up our position in a little valley with a dense wood upon our right, and a gentle slope of green pasture before us that ran without a break to the earthen redoubts that crowned the summit. Then the morning flashed out with its splendid fervor of crimson and gold, and almost at the moment the hoarse roar of the guns awakened a thousand echoes. A flock of sheep that was straying on the hill-side—gray specks on the long stretch of green—went bleating hither and thither, and the frightened things came right into our lines when the flash of the artillery broke from the distant ridge. For my own part, I had a feeling of thankfulness when a battery of guns of the Gardes Françaises came up at eight, and we were left to make our breakfast in peace. But somewhere on the right, among the thick woods of Marchemont, a battery

played upon the slope before us, and ploughed up the green turf like a field in the early spring-time.

"'Tis the poor grave-diggers they make, anyway," said Mahony at my elbow; "but we can't say they don't dig them deep enough."

"What?" I asked.

"Shure, I wouldn't say the word of bad-luck, but maybe some of us will find out when we're climbin' the hill. They make them more to my moind in the ould chapel-yard at Kilmahone."

The curious fancy caught hold of myself, and I could not shake it off, for the suspense of waiting tries the nerves and gives you time to weigh the chances. But while we lay in the hollow the rain of iron fell unceasingly upon the slope; the regiments of France were massing on the left towards Ramecroin, and our comrades of Dillon's and of Dorrington's went past us with a cheer. For all the world we lay like a ship in a quiet harbor that soon must meet the wild peril of the storm whose black breath is even now upon the deep. The battery flashed and thundered on our right. Behind the crest were the Dutch and Austrians, and meanwhile we lay in perfect quiet where the little brook ran bickering with its summer song, and the mossy turf was starred with blue campanula. We did not know how soon the hill-side would be strewn with mangled limbs, and

the clear flow of the spring run red with Irish blood.

There was incessant coming and going in our rear—the swift spurring of flying horsemen, the steady tramp of strong battalions, the gathering cloud of battle drawing round us. At such a time the spirit of the men of Clare's was always lightest. Their kindly humor broke out in sally and song. Soldiers of fortune, they flung the dice of life and death with a careless hand and a joyous heart. But to-day a fiercer temper held their speech in check, and moved them to a man. By the side of the Scheldt they were again fighting the battle of their country, and the Sassenach would again hear the cry that had rung in vain in the valley of the Boyne and by the glorious walls of Limerick.

Meanwhile the day wore on, and we had received no order to advance. In the distance we could hear the thunder of the guns and the cheers of the fighting men. I saw Lally and De Riche-lieu in close conference with my Lord Clare, and I surmised from their faces that somewhere the day was going hard with France.

My cousin Charles Dillon and Justin O'Neil—the same who afterwards shot M. de Goncourt, and would have played at cards with Satan himself—were lying stretched out near me engaged in a game of piquet, while I watched the play

with a languid interest. As I lay there I heard a loud cry that settled into a murmur of astonishment and horror. We leaped to our feet and looked in wonder for the cause. And then I saw a sight that almost stopped the beating of my heart.

Some way up the slope before us towards the crest was a little scarlet-coated figure that ran gayly up the hill where the round-shot tore the earth and ploughed the blackened lines. It never halted, but, turning once, waved a hand of salutation, and then went on, unconscious of the danger.

"Great God!" cried O'Brien, letting his cards fall fluttering to the ground; "'tis the Brigadier."

But I had known the child in an instant. How he had come here I cannot tell, but the little face, gleaming with boyish mischief, was set towards the frowning summit, and the little feet went swiftly up the slope of death. I fancied I could almost hear the piping music of his laughter. He never stayed for an instant, but ran straight on, while the wings of Death passed over him and darkened him with their shadow.

It was then that one could see how his comrades of Clare's loved him. The iron discipline that makes us mere machines held us fast in our places; but there was not a man along our lines whose heart was not torn with grief and terror for the safety of his little friend. Some of us

covered our faces, whom no personal danger could have moved. Every instant we waited to see him fall.

Hardly had I seen him than I thought of Mahony—the sight must turn the old soldier into stone. The child had already almost gained the top of the crest, and rested for a moment as though wearied by his climbing. He called back to us, or seemed to call, and waved his little cap in childish triumph. Once the ground was torn up almost at his feet, but this only seemed to give him cause for mirth. Perhaps he had no sense of danger with his friends so near him. At that moment, I think, we realized how much he had been to us in the camp and on the march, and how far his boyish pranks had lightened the tedium of our lives. For we felt that our little comrade would never return alive.

Then I saw the old sergeant, who had only now for the first time seen the sight we had all been watching. His face was drawn and blanched; for a moment the sight seemed to have deprived him of all sense and feeling—but only for a moment. With a wild oath he flung his musket to the ground, and, leaping the rivulet that ran along our front, he ran wildly up the hill. No sooner had the child seen himself pursued than he continued his flight, and had almost reached the base of the earthwork when he seemed content to stand

and enjoy his triumph. But Mahony ran almost as straight as an arrow, and with astonishing fleetness. He never wavered for an instant, and when he reached the boy we set up a great cheer, in which our pent-up feelings found an utterance.

In a moment we saw the lad perched on the sergeant's shoulder and waving his hands towards us, the sunshine falling on his shining curls, and though our words were lost in the far-off thunder of battle, we called out to both of them words of affection and encouragement.

Mahony stood motionless for a moment or two looking down that valley of death, and then slowly began to descend the hill. How he escaped so long I do not know; he seemed to bear a charmed life. For a long time it seemed as if he would return in safety, after all. Then that happened which we had all looked forward to with fear and dread. He was half-way down the hill. Suddenly we saw him stumble, leap forward, and fall upon his face—lying there a motionless speck upon the hill-side. While you could count a hundred, though it may not have been so long, there was no sign of life in that huddled scarlet heap. Then with a quick, convulsive start he leaped to his feet, and, catching up the Brigadier in his arms, began to stagger towards our lines. He fell to his knees once or twice, but again managed to gain his feet. We saw that his hard-set face

was as white as the face of a corpse, and his eyes were set with a fixed and glassy stare, unlike the eyes of a living man. In his throat there was a red gash. But he still held the child clasped tightly in his arms, though he ran, staggering, more and more faintly, till he reached the brook and dropped almost at my feet. As they lay upon the grass the arms of the old soldier were thrown about the child, but neither of them stirred.

There was the silence of death about us. In the pauses of battle one could hear the undersong of the rivulet, but no one spoke a word. For we knew—alas! it was plain to see—that Death had sealed the friendship of this pair of friends. The little Brigadier had made his last march; the men of Clare's had lost their playmate.

I covered the child with my cloak, and knelt down by the side of Mahony, who was still alive. But he saw neither me nor the comrades who were bending over him. His mind was far away in Kilmahone, with the hay-fields sweet and fragrant, and the hawthorn buds in the old boren. The exile's eyes were resting on the scenes of his fatherland, and his ears were filled with the dear, familiar laughter of his youth. It mattered not now that the artillery of Saxe thundered from the heights of Vezon, that the bayonets of Cumberland were flashing on our right. His field of vi-

sion was filled with the joy and tenderness of morning. I could faintly catch the words, broken and indistinct, as I bathed his brow and lips with the water that some one brought me from the brook. I own the tears were streaming from my eyes. After a while his lips grew quite motionless, and I thought that he was gone. I was about to lay his head down when he suddenly opened his eyes and looked at me fixedly. Perhaps the sight of the scarlet uniform brought back his consciousness. He made a feeble effort to rise, but could do no more than lift his hand.

"Tell the bhoys to take good care av the Brigadier. I'm an old man, an' must be going home."
And he had gone home.

Part 111

THE KING'S FAVOR

PART III

THE KING'S FAVOR

I.—TWO MEN AND A MAID

“LIAR!”

I leaned across the table without a moment's hesitation and struck him smartly upon the mouth with my glove. For an instant he showed his white teeth with an ugly frown, but only for an instant; and then nonchalantly took a pinch of snuff from the jewelled box which he was holding between his fingers and thumb. I leaned across the table, watching him with hate and contempt in my eyes; but he never looked at me, nor spoke a word. He merely drew his laced handkerchief from his pocket, and airily flicked away the snuff which had fallen upon his sleeve. I waited to see what he would do, for I knew that M. de Saverne was no coward, and would not naturally stand a blow. Whatever his character—and I knew him to be both a gamester and a bully—I had always heard him set down as a man of invincible courage. I was therefore the more surprised that he had

not instantly resented the insult which I had deliberately designed, and which I was equally determined to vindicate as a gentleman and a man of honor.

Rising from his seat with perfect composure, he walked over and closed the door of the garden-house, that lay open to the summer sunshine. Then he resumed his place at the table, and poured out for himself a glass of wine, watching the while the golden bubbles winking in the long, thin glass. He held it up between his eyes and the light, and then slowly drank it without a word. I knew that he was playing a part, but I could not tell what, though, indeed, my heart was too full of indignation and rage to have my mind perfectly clear.

He laid down his glass, and looked at me with a shadowy smile playing about his wicked lips.

"M. le Capitaine has the manners of—a soldier." He spoke with great emphasis.

"I am a soldier, sir; but I do not forget that I am a gentleman."

"Without doubt; all his countrymen are gentlemen. I have been accustomed to think that I also had some claim to the title."

"You have now reason to know how I value that claim," I answered. "I cannot speak more plainly."

"I have no doubt I shall do myself the honor

of killing you by-and-by; but"—and there was an ugly sneer in his words—"I am anxious to preserve your good opinion."

"I am prepared to back my opinion with this," I answered, laying my hand significantly on my sword, which lay beside me on the table.

"'Tis a letter of recommendation I desire, not an epitaph," he replied, in the pleasant comedy manner he had assumed. "You must be aware that we cannot quarrel here."

"Why not?" I asked, bluntly.

"Your excellent sense has no doubt already pointed out several objections. To fight without witnesses now might prove a matter for the crowd in the morning, and, personally, I have no desire to renew my acquaintance with the oubliettes of the Bastille, or make my bow to Monsieur de Paris."

"If that is all," I said, in wonder at this excuse made by a man of his character, "the Chevalier Nugent—"

"It is not usual among gentlemen for the host to look on while his guests present their compliments to one another with the point of the rapier. In Ireland you may have another custom, but here we respect the roof that shelters us."

"In Ireland," I answered, in a white-heat, "we do not slander the friend whose wine we drink, whose bread we eat. We do not sneer away the

honor of his daughters, or liken them to the courtesans who flaunt the streets and make their shame a step to honor. Before Heaven, M. de Saverne," I went on, "I do not know what keeps me from killing you where you stand with as little compunction as I would truss a partridge. It is true that I have lived in camps and had men for my comrades who were not all smiles and bows. But they respected the honor and good name of their friends, and were not ready to smirch a woman's good name that they might turn a *bon mot*, or— I should like to know what wicked thought is now lying in your black heart, M. le Marquis?"

He met my eyes without the least emotion. Certainly M. de Saverne was not wanting in nerve.

"Well, sir?"

"And Mademoiselle Gabrielle is only a girl," I went on. "And yet—"

"Pardon me; on this head there must be no more misapprehension. Mademoiselle Gabrielle was not the subject of our conversation."

"How?" I cried, aghast at his colossal effrontery.

"As I have said, sir," he answered, coldly, "you have done your best to provoke a quarrel. You have not spared me your insults, for which, as I have suggested, I will probably send you to

Hades by-and-by; but I will not permit you to pervert my words and make me the vehicle of your own loose thoughts."

I rose to my feet, but could only look at him in open wonder.

"Oh, sir, you need not play the bully with Alphonse de Saverne. I am not a child to be frightened by a beggarly soldier of fortune. I know all the tricks of your trade—every one of them—from the lifting of your eyebrows to your latest German oath, and I do not value them—that. But this is another matter. I have the most profound regard for Mademoiselle Gabrielle, and I should look upon it as a great misfortune that you—even you, whose hireling sword is sharper than your wits—should put me in the wrong regarding her."

"A few minutes since I heard the expression of your regard, M. de Saverne," I said, looking at him gravely, and endeavoring to discover what motive prompted him to treat me in this way.

"As I have already said, you did nothing of the kind, sir. I spoke of women as I found them—loosely, perhaps, but truly—and I think I said they had their price—that, or some such phrase. But every general statement holds exceptions—none more than this. Do you think, sir, it would be to her advantage that you and I should make

Mademoiselle Gabrielle the subject of a quarrel?"

I made no answer, standing on the other side of the table and regarding him fixedly.

"Well, sir?"

"I am only wondering, M. le Marquis, what motive prompts you to lie to me in this fashion."

He grew red under my words, and you will see I did not spare them. As, indeed, how could I? Though I mistrusted and disliked the man, we had been chatting pleasantly together in the garden for nearly an hour. At first he had affected to treat me with a certain air of condescension which I greatly resented. But I knew that the Chevalier Nugent had a great regard for him and frequently entertained him at his table, and for that reason I was the less inclined to cause any unpleasantness between us. But I knew that my kind old friend had little knowledge of men, and was untutored as a child in the ways of the world. Again and again it had been upon my lips to warn him regarding M. de Saverne, whose reputation had not been made yesterday, but I was unwilling to strike any man in the back, and had therefore held my peace.

I had already met M. de Saverne here upon several occasions, for at this time my regiment was quartered in Paris during the peace, and though I thought he regarded me in the light of an intruder, we had treated one another with an

outward courtesy which was our common duty as guests at the same table. To-day, however, we had been thrown more intimately together, and had already spent nearly an hour alone together, as I have said, when M. de Saverne became more intimate and friendly than I had ever before known him. Perhaps the wine he had been drinking loosened his tongue; perhaps he thought my tastes and mode of life resembled his own; but whatever the cause, he had shown me his real character, which I already more than suspected, and had openly boasted of conduct at which an honorable man would blush and hang his head. I merely listened without surprise, and it may be that he took my silence for acquiescence and approval. Then he began to talk of Mademoiselle Gabrielle, at first airily praising her youth and beauty, and then with vague phrases and hints hardly veiled laughing away her character, and sneering at her pretended innocence. My first impulse had been to take him by the throat, but I was willing to see how far the man would go, and merely filled my glass and let him talk. Then, almost before I could realize his words, he had made a suggestion so horrible that I looked up at him in loathing and horror, and he, seeing the look upon my face, dexterously turned the sentence and declared that he was only expressing the ambition that reigned in every woman's heart.

The king's mistress! A wanton of the Parc aux Cerfs!

It was then that I reached across the table and struck him upon the face a well-merited blow.

I could now assign no adequate reason why he had exercised so much restraint, and had not instantly resented, as I hoped and expected he would, the blow that I had struck him. From what I knew regarding him, I had no doubt the absence of witnesses would not have held him back for a moment, and his regard for the chevalier, whose guest we both were, was merely a figure of speech with the Marquis de Saverne, whose creation dated from before Henri III. Nor, as I have said, was his courage to be suspected, for there was no man in the Quartier Marais, nor for that matter in the whole of France, with a reputation more dangerous—a gamester who kept his character clean by a fine turn of the wrist. There was some other cause that I could not imagine or divine, but I could see that he felt he had gone too far and was anxious to disarm any suspicions I might entertain. There was another suggestion which occurred to me, but I put it from my mind in an instant. The honor of Mademoiselle Gabrielle, the toast of every Irish regiment by the Rhine and Meuse, the hidden beauty of the Maison Verte! Certainly, however daring and unscrupulous M. de Saverne might be, and I knew

him to be both, I was convinced that he had formed no such design, and that nothing was further from his purpose than to become Gabrielle's lover. He was not young; he had none of the graces and few of the gifts that charm a woman, except courage and self-resource, and I had heard that Madame de Brienne exercised great influence over him. Besides, I had watched him carefully—and there is little that escapes the jealous eyes of a lover—nor could I see anything in his conduct to awaken my anxiety or put me upon my guard. And yet there was some dark design, some crooked purpose, lurking in his mind which he had almost revealed to me I could not doubt. But whatever it might be my exasperation was so extreme that it overmastered my caution, and I confess my own desire now was to provoke a quarrel.

"There are poisoners of two kinds, M. le Marquis," I said. "Your kind is the more dangerous. I do not believe one word you have spoken."

"You are more familiar with language of that kind than I, M. Dillon," he answered, with a swift play on the words, "and I shall not seek to vie with you in the language of recrimination. You do not seem satisfied with the explanation I have offered you, and for the present our interview is terminated."

"First," I said, turning contemptuously upon

my heel, "we shall see what the father of the lady has to say to your proposition."

"Now, by Heaven!" he cried, leaping to his feet, and his eyes for the first time betraying his inward passion, "this is going too far. It was not enough that a gentleman like myself should condescend to treat familiarly a beggarly footpad who has not even the manners of a roturier—I must listen to his threats and insults. I have made up my mind. I will complete my condescension, and hope you will appreciate the honor I do you. Come, sir, I will kill you like the dog you are."

He drew his sword, while I laughed contemptuously and kicked my chair aside.

"We can talk of your honor afterwards," I said. "I do not forget M. de Polignac of the Corps du Roi."

I had often heard this infamous story, but had been quite unable to credit it; yet when I looked in his eyes and saw how my chance words had struck home, I felt that if ever a sudden confession of guilt was written on a man's face I read it clearly now. That was little more than murder, and committed under the most appalling circumstances—the injured wife a mere girl, the dishonored husband a lad barely escaped from tutelage; but the facts were never clearly proved, and M. de Saverne had escaped without open

censure. But a grave suspicion, amounting in many minds to certainty, had survived, and the melancholy history was by no means forgotten.

"You will meet M. de Polignac presently; you can then present my compliments."

There was no trace of bravado in the man's manner. Though I knew his heart was aflame with the passion of hate, he never betrayed the least emotion in his voice or attitude. He spoke with a quiet assurance bordering upon contempt, yet not wholly betraying it, and moved with an air of indifference—indeed, almost lassitude—as though engaged in the most ordinary and trivial transactions of life.

"Come, M. le Marquis," I thought, "I shall change your tone presently, and with the help of Heaven rid the earth of a designing villain, who has too long cumbered it. You will not strike me in the back as you struck the lad De Polignac, but will find Anthony Dillon a cock of another hackle." I think I may say, without arrogance or egotism, that this was no empty boast, and that at that time I knew few more accomplished swordsmen than myself. By sedulous study, especially in Rome, where I had quite mastered the Italian manner, I had strengthened and perfected a natural aptitude beyond the common, and had played with the best swordsmen in France on equal terms. I do not know whether M. de

Saverne was acquainted with my reputation, but I will do him the justice to say that I do not think such knowledge would have influenced his conduct for a moment. This bad man had, at least, the merit of courage.

The garden-house was a spacious room, with its open windows festooned by clambering rose-trees that were now a blushing mass of flowers, and situated in a little shrubbery which afforded the completest privacy. We were little likely to be interrupted, for the domestics never came hither, and the chevalier was not expected to return till later in the afternoon. It was due to his absence that I had been thrown so intimately into the society of M. de Saverne.

The latter nonchalantly laid aside his coat and turned up the ruffles at his wrist. Then he came into the middle of the room and saluted me contemptuously with his sword.

"Now, sir."

I have heard it said that at a time like this the first touch of steel acts upon the blood like wine, but in my case I have always found it different. I experience no feeling of elation, but, on the contrary, an obstinate indifference far removed alike from hope and apprehension, and which I take to be the true basis of courage.

As our swords crossed beneath M. de Saverne's careless manner I saw that his nerve was shaken ;

he betrayed his feeling in the twitching of his under-lip, but I think, and thought then, it was rather from vexation than apprehension. For some reason he had been unwilling to enter into this quarrel that I had forced upon him, and he was clearly enraged at my pertinacity and his own weakness in permitting himself to be drawn into it. This gave me at first an advantage by which I was not slow to profit, and it was not long before I taught him the danger of thrusting in twice after a feint. But the point of my weapon sobered him; I soon learned that he had not earned his reputation for nothing, and that in coolness and finesse I had met an antagonist of the first order. Indeed, I think there was little to choose between us, for though I was longer in the reach he had the advantage of height, and I never met any man so swift in his parry and return.

I was now growing interested, and in my interest had almost forgotten the cause of our difference, which up till that time had filled me with contempt and indignation. I even began vaguely to wonder how it would end, but my curiosity was not destined to be satisfied.

"Will you be good enough to explain what this means, gentlemen?"

It was the voice of the Chevalier Nugent. He stood in the open doorway, his hat held in his

hand, and his tall figure drawn to its full height. I have never known any man who so combined the dignity of a gentleman with the air and bearing of a soldier; and even now, at seventy years, he carried himself with an erectness and freedom which belonged rather to vigorous manhood than to age. He had an air of natural distinction to which his snowy hair and fine eyes, the fire of which seemed to have not in the least degree abated, added wonderfully, and I have been told that in his youth he was esteemed the handsomest man in France—a fact I can very well believe. He was of the noble family of Dardistown, in the county of Meath, and we know there is no better blood in Ireland.

He came into the garden-house, looking from the one to the other of us in surprise. We both stood perfectly still for a moment, and then M. de Saverne, with an inclination of his head, sheathed his rapier, and made me a bow, the meaning of which I did not fail to catch.

“M. Dillon has marched under Saxe,” he said, “and profited by the lessons of that great soldier. I have been told he can make his enemies fight whenever he pleases, and it is to his advantage.”

“There is little honor or advantage in crossing swords with M. de Saverne,” I said, keeping my ground and looking at him sternly, “nor in this quarrel.”

"You may now slander me in safety, sir. As his guest, I am now in the hands of the Chevalier Nugent. To-morrow I am at your service."

"You forget yourselves, gentlemen. I am not accustomed to hear such language under my roof, nor can I now permit it. I have no desire to know the cause of your difference, but this must go no further. You owe it to me that it should end here."

"I am quite willing," I said, "that you yourself should judge between us. If you are satisfied with the language of M. de Saverne, I have nothing more to say; but frankly—"

"I can hear nothing regarding the guest who honors me with his presence. You must not ask it. Come, come! I was young myself, and know the outcome of a hasty word. M. de Saverne—"

"Is your most obedient servant, sir," said the marquis, in that manner he knew so well to assume. "I regret a hasty word has led me to forget myself. I am old enough to know better, and hasten to tender you my most sincere apology. At the same time, I ask you to believe I intended no want of respect. I endeavored, no doubt, to show M. Dillon that our difference was based on a misunderstanding—"

"I am sure M. Dillon will leave himself in my hands. I was a quarrelsome fellow myself once on a time, and was none the worse for an old

head to guide my hot heart. There, there—say no more. We will drink a bottle of wine to the settlement of your hasty quarrel, and be the better friends for the new understanding.”

I was not satisfied—I was very much the reverse; and I do not know what restrained me from putting my thoughts into speech and detailing to the chevalier the atrocious suggestion which I had resented, and which had awakened my indignation and anger. I know now he would not have credited it, and, had he listened to me at all, would have believed that I was mistaken; and, indeed, I myself almost began to doubt whether I had not been too hasty, and had not found more in the language than was meant or intended. Nor had I the easy art of putting myself right and placing others in the wrong which was possessed by my antagonist, and I knew, however strong my position, I had no chance with him when it came to an affair of words. For the rest, I felt that I could not persevere in the course I had taken, and though I was determined that I should not relax in my vigilance, I was now compelled to yield my ground.

“If M. de Saverne is satisfied,” I said, “I suppose I must express myself contented. I should, however, like to warn him that another misunderstanding on the same subject will not be so easily healed.”

"Since M. Dillon was at Fontenoy," said the chevalier, his fine old face lighted with a smile, "he finds it hard to retreat with grace. I see, M. le Marquis, that I must do for my countryman what he has only lamely done for himself. Come, Antony, we are old friends, and old friends have their privileges. I take this on myself. M. Dillon regrets, M. de Saverne, that any misunderstanding should have arisen, and, like yourself, he promises to forget what has occurred. You are both satisfied that an old man, who is only fit now to preserve peace, should have his way, and are willing to tell me what you think of the wine that M. d'Argenson has just sent me from his vineyard in Languedoc. Believe me, you should deny nothing to the man who offers you roses and wine."

"I should find it hard to deny anything to M. le Chevalier," said M. de Saverne, with a low bow.

It is necessary that I should say a word or two regarding the Chevalier Nugent, who belonged to a past generation, and is now altogether forgotten by his countrymen. But at the time of which I speak there were few men better known or more beloved than himself, and though he now lived a life of honorable retirement there were few gentlemen in the Irish Brigade who had not at one time or other dined at his table, and revived in his presence the splendid memories of the past.

We were, indeed, proud of our old comrade. His invincible courage, that had shared the laurels of Cremona with O'Mahony, who afterwards entered the service of Spain, and died Count of Castile; his unstained honor and integrity; his sweet and pleasant courtesy; his dignity, devoid of affectation—all the qualities which go to make a complete and perfect gentleman were united in him to a superlative degree. Always a gallant soldier, always a splendid gentleman, though of no exalted fortune, he joined to the manner of the *veille cour* a tenderness and simplicity of life that puts me to shame when I think of it.

I can see him now at the head of his table, with his snow-white head and noble face, his eyes glowing and his cheeks flushed as he recalled the memories of the past, and followed the bayonets of France through defeat and victory. I think he was then happiest, and that was a proud moment for the young soldier, fresh from home, when the kind old veteran laid his hand upon his shoulder, and spoke a friendly word of encouragement and approval. For myself, I had received many marks of kindness and attention at his hands, and was a frequent guest at his table. Indeed, I loved and honored him for his own sake beyond any that I knew, but there was also another reason which had drawn me with increasing frequency to the *Maison Verte*.

I cannot now describe Mademoiselle Gabrielle, but I know that of all the women I ever knew she bore away the palm of beauty. She was then in her eighteenth year, and already gave promise of a splendid womanhood. Even before I saw her the fame of her beauty had reached me by the banks of the Rhine, but I was unprepared for the dream of loveliness which dawned on me when I first met her. Her eyes, filled with the light and evening mystery of our own western sky, were shaded by long, dark lashes; her dark hair caught the sunlight in heavy masses; her lips were like rose-buds with the morning dew on them.

The heart of the chevalier was bound up in his daughter—the child of his old age. He never ceased wondering at her beauty, that like a half-opened flower already gave promise of the perfect bloom. His devotion was so complete that he had no hope or desire of which she was not the object and the centre; and she ruled with a complete and perfect sovereignty. But he still looked on her as a child, and I do not think he ever dreamed for a moment that others already desired the beauty he worshipped in secret.

During the rest of the afternoon M. de Saverne treated me with a frigid courtesy which I inwardly resented, though I could see that he now regarded me with more attention than he had ever

bestowed upon me before. I caught his eyes resting gravely on me two or three times, and I flattered myself with the thought that in some way he had begun to fear me. Certainly, had I known the blackness of his heart and the height of infamy to which he was capable of reaching, he would have had reason, but I never imagined for a moment he was already working out his infamous design, and laying his plans with a cunning it is impossible to realize or describe. I was altogether lulled into a sense of false security. He took little pains to disguise his dislike and almost contempt for myself, but his manner towards the chevalier was full of respect and friendliness, and his speech overflowed with a cheerful gayety whose charm I was myself unwillingly compelled to acknowledge. Moreover, he treated Mademoiselle Gabrielle with a studied deference, and at no time was I able to observe the slightest approach towards familiarity upon his part. But I own that I could not now see them together without a vague and undefined foreboding of evil, for the hideous suggestion to which he had given utterance a few hours before continually rose before me when I heard the sound of her girlish laughter.

I confess I was overjoyed when the evening ended and M. de Saverne rose to take his departure, which he did at an early hour. Our conversation had frequently lapsed into long intervals

of frigid silence; and notwithstanding the evident efforts of the chevalier, who was at all times an excellent host, we had failed to find any topic either of interest or amusement. Indeed, I admit that under no circumstances could it have been otherwise, for not once did either M. de Saverne or myself address one another directly, but maintained that stubborn neutrality which we had assumed from the moment we had sheathed our swords. I found it altogether impossible to disguise my real feelings, so strong was my aversion towards him; while he, on his part, was either actuated by the same feelings, or did not think it worth his while to conceal his sentiments.

The chevalier had expressed his intention of accompanying his guest some distance on his way homeward, and had gone in-doors to fetch his hat and cane. M. le Marquis and myself were left standing together, with Mademoiselle Gabrielle seated a little way off. M. de Saverne turned to me in his suave and easy manner, and addressed me for the first time:

"I trust, M. Dillon, our acquaintanceship will not end this evening. I had hoped we should have known one another more intimately."

I understood his meaning at once.

"I have no doubt," I answered, "that would have been the case had we not been interrupted. Like yourself, I look on it as a matter of regret."

"The next time we will be more fortunate. I have no doubt we shall then form a lasting attachment. It will not be my fault if we do not."

"I reciprocate that wish with all my heart. At the first hint, M. de Saverne," I added, looking at him significantly, "you may expect to find me at your door."

"I shall warn my lackeys to expect you. Good-evening, sir."

He turned his back upon me, and, going over to Mademoiselle Gabrielle, made his adieux in a low voice, that I could not hear, but I did hear with a touch of bitter jealousy the pleased and flattered laugh his words evoked.

When M. de Saverne and the chevalier had left us mademoiselle remained seated with her back turned towards me, and began to rearrange the flowers on the little table where we had supped, as though unconscious of my presence. I stood watching for a good while the picture which she made, and then without a word went over and sat down at the other side of the table. She kept her eyes fixed on her work, and neither of us broke the silence. There is no coward like the man who loves a woman. I had not given a pinch of snuff for the rapier of M. de Saverne, but I blushed and trembled like a lad to meet the eyes of the silent, scornful girl who refused to look at me. I could not trust my voice—indeed, I could think of noth-

ing to say—and I felt myself grow alternately hot and cold in my embarrassment. Then, almost without thinking of what I did, I reached across and laid my hand upon hers.

She permitted her hand to remain for a moment in mine, and then, quickly withdrawing it, rose to her feet.

"I think you have forgotten yourself, M. Dillon," she said, slowly.

"When I am near you," I said, "I forget everything but you. You know I love you, Gabrielle."

"I know. Why have you quarrelled, monsieur, with M. de Saverne?"

"Have I quarrelled with M. de Saverne?"

"You have insulted him."

"I care nothing for M. de Saverne."

"At least, you should care for my father and—for me."

"For you more than all the world," I answered.

"Men always say that," she said, with a delightful coquetry which was quite unconscious, "and women love to hear them say it—even when it means nothing."

"You care to hear me say I love you?"

"Naturally; but you have not answered my question. If you have not quarrelled—"

"Why need we talk of M. de Saverne?" I said.

"Let us speak of ourselves—of yourself, who are all the world to me. Listen to me, Gabrielle," I went on, with a passionate insistence. "You know that every word I speak is true as the voice of God. I cannot flatter you; I cannot turn smooth compliments like that mincing poppet who dishonors you with his thoughts; but I can love you with a heart that is all yours, and yours alone. From the first moment, when I saw you in that room twelve months ago, I have had only one hope, one thought, one desire. My heart has been singing one song; the world has contained one flower—the sweet Irish rose that fills my life with fragrance. Your heart tells you I love you."

I caught her little hands and pressed them passionately to my lips. She did not withdraw them, and I felt with the swift instinct of a lover that she was about to yield to the imperative insistence of my appeal—but only for an instant. Her hands trembled to my touch, and then she rose to her feet with what sounded almost like a sob, and left a clear space between us.

"It is only a dream from which we awaken. M. de Saverne says the heart is always wrong."

"He! He has no heart. Listen to the pleading of your own."

"I cannot," she said; "I dare not."

I can see her still—my old sweetheart that is always young—her tall figure standing before me

in her simple white gown, with one red rose in her dark hair and a look of fear and hesitation on her face and in her eyes. I felt that a struggle was taking place within her, but I did not then know—fool that I was—what thoughts and emotions were contending for the mastery of her heart, and what fatal poison had already tainted the source and spring of her young life. She looked so sweet and innocent. No shadow of the world seemed to have fallen across the pure radiance of her spirit, and darkened the hopes and dreams of her happy girlhood.

"If you loved me," I said, "you would not hesitate. And I know you love me, Gabrielle."

"Ah! I thought—but that is finished."

"What is finished?" I cried, looking at her in astonishment.

"My childhood," she answered. "I am a woman, and have begun to think. Love is pleasant, but it is only a little comedy. Oh! you think you are serious, but it does not last. I have learned—"

"What have you learned?"

"That there are better things than love."

"There is nothing in the world half so good."

"Men always say that when they woo; they speak differently when they have won. It is a dream."

"Then what is real?" I cried, looking at her

in wonder, and with a feeling akin to terror at my heart.

"Power is real, wealth is real—a home in the Marais, chateaux in the country, servants, carriages, diamonds, titles—to turn the great world round your finger, and perhaps— Can love give me these things? Can you?"

"I can only give you an honest heart that will serve you with unfailing worship."

"And poverty and trouble, my poor Anthony. Men learn the lessons of wisdom later than women do. I once thought that I should like to pipe with Strephon, and keep the sheep with Corydon. When I become a great lady perhaps I shall affect the pastoral life. But in the meantime—"

"In the meantime—"

"I shall become a great lady."

"Is that so easily done?"

"There is nothing easier. Women do not fight with rapiers; they have weapons of their own. Beauty moves the world—it commands the conquerors. You yourself have told me. What was Madame de Chateaudoux? M. de Saverne—"

But the light had already begun to break upon me—nay, it had already made clear the ghastly truth, and had left me feeling like one who gropes his way in a charnel-house with no means of es-

cape or hope of deliverance. I saw it all ; I read the hideous truth, though I could not yet realize its full significance. The sentiments to which I had been listening, the phrases so coldly cynical and so foreign to the sweet lips and tender eyes of the girl I loved—I could now trace their source and origin. Unconsciously she had almost caught the trick of his speech as she uttered them, and I saw, with his mocking sneer and his wicked smile behind her, M. de Saverne. I thought of his thinly veiled suggestion that had sounded to me like blasphemy, and the look of cynical amusement that lightened his face when I showed my indignation at his language. For some wicked purpose of his own he had instilled this deadly poison into her mind, and turned the current of her heart into this fatal channel.

I felt all the while that she did not know the real meaning of her words—that she did not realize their full purport, and that no thought of evil mingled with the dreams that filled her girlish fancy. And yet for a lover to hear such language from the lips he loved was to feel that his hope had passed from his life—that his treasure had escaped from his grasp.

I stood almost stunned and bewildered, and then, scarcely knowing what I did, I caught hold of her hands and fell on my knees before her.

“Listen to me, Gabrielle!” I cried. “You must

hear me, though I speak for the last time. It is not for my own sake, but for yours, that I plead with you. It is true that M. de Saverne and I have quarrelled—that I would have killed him had I been able, and only because he dared to put in his own way the words I have heard you speak. You do not know their meaning; you do not know the world; you do not know the wicked heart of him who has put these thoughts in your mind. They are all a lie; they lead to death and dishonor. You are far happier here than in the splendid wickedness of the court. Here you have peace and love and honor; there—God forgive me, my beloved, I cannot speak the words.”

I saw that I had frightened her by the passionate extravagance of my language, and that she could not understand the reasons that had given force and vehemence to my appeal. But I could not speak more plainly. I could not give further shape and form to the hideous foreboding that cast its black and fatal shadow across the future.

“I do not understand you, M. Dillon,” she said, coldly.

“I pray God you never may,” I answered; “but my words are true. Can you not love me; Gabrielle?”

“You are my friend. You can never be my lover.”

"Is that the last word? I thought once—"

"And I—but I have discovered I have no heart—none in the world. It can never be. My poor Anthony, you must shut me out of your heart, and by-and-by you will find one who will love you as you deserve to be loved. Our way is different."

"My way is not the way of M. de Saverne," I said, bitterly. "I can give you little more than poverty, but I can give you love and honor and a faithful heart. What has he to offer? Has he told your father what he only dared to whisper to yourself?"

I saw a deep flush rise to her cheeks and forehead.

"M. de Saverne has never dared to speak as you have done," she said, scornfully. "At least, he is a gentleman."

"And I am only a poor soldier who loves you dearly, and will love you always. You will not forget that? Some day you will know that love is not the worst thing in the world, and wears longer than the promise of a courtier. Forgive me if I have pained you; but I spoke the truth, and all I said was said in love and gentleness. It is better that I should go."

Her answer was long in coming, but it came at length.

"It is best that you should go."

I looked at her for a moment doubtfully, and then, as though I had been walking in a dream, I turned towards the gate, and left her standing—a tall, white figure in the dusk, with the scent of roses in the air and the evening-song of the birds filling the garden with their jubilant notes. I had made so sure of her love, I had dwelt upon it with such certainty, that it seemed to have become a part of my life, and had given color and shape to all my hopes and dreams. And now my house of cards had come tumbling to the ground ; I had been living in a fool's paradise, and at last awakened to my folly. But if that had been all I think I could have borne it without the sense of pain and dismay that filled my heart to overflowing. I could have faced my natural pain and disappointment with the courage of a man. There was more than that—more that I could not yet realize or put into words. I could scarcely believe that this was the girl I had loved, whose innocence surrounded her like a delicate perfume, and whose purity had made my love almost a religion. She had not spoken, but another in her place ; the voice was Gabrielle's, but the sentiments—I knew what had happened. I had stood blindly by and permitted M. de Saverne, for his own wicked purpose, to poison her mind with his insidious whispers. And his purpose ? Was it possible that in an unguarded moment he had

betrayed his secret, and had he already designed for her the fate of Mademoiselle de Tercelin, whose story I had heard, and whose father's heart had been broken? I shuddered to think of it. It was too wicked—too terrible for belief. And yet, though I only suspected it, I felt, notwithstanding, that I had grasped the truth, and that a terrible fate was being prepared for the woman I loved. And now, what course should I take? What ground had I to speak plainly and act boldly when I only feared and suspected? To Gabrielle I felt I could say nothing more; to her father I dared not hint the impending catastrophe that menaced his happiness. He would not listen to me; he would not credit it. His open and unsuspecting nature, so free from doubt and full of confidence, gave me no room to hope that he would lend belief to my fears or take any steps to avert the evil. He was so strong in his simple rectitude that he was incapable of suspecting others. Yet my duty was so clear and so imperative that I felt I must speak, whatever might be the result. After that I would settle my account with M. de Saverne in my own way; and if I were right in my surmise, not with him alone, but with another, stronger and still more powerful.

When I reached the gate I stood there for a long time, looking back at the house with a sense

of foreboding that was quite new to me. You can picture my feelings. For months this quiet house and pleasant garden had been a harbor of refuge, where I had found unfailing rest and peace, with overflowing love and friendship. Now it seemed that its doors were about to be closed upon me forever, and in the wreck of my own hopes I was also to see the ruin and despair of those I loved and honored. I felt that I was helpless to prevent it—that I could oppose no resistance to the power of which M. de Saverne was only the despicable instrument, and that to attempt to avert it was only to bring about my own destruction. This last consideration did not weigh with me for a moment; rather it added strength to the vehemence of my rage, and my determination to act with courage and promptitude if the opportunity were afforded me. In the meantime, whatever might be the result, I should, as was my duty, warn the chevalier of the danger with which he was threatened, and watch M. de Saverne with the eyes of a hawk for the first treacherous movement.

I still stood lost in thought when I heard the sound of footsteps behind me, and, looking round, saw M. le Chevalier close upon me. It was now nearly dark, but I could not mistake the tall, upright figure and the pleasant voice.

"You go early to roost, Anthony, *mon cher*, for a soldier. There, there, I have heard good news. You must come back and drink another bottle with me."

"I am glad you have heard good news, sir," I answered; "but I cannot go back."

"Will not, rather. Well, well, I know the ways of the gentlemen of Clare's. I'm afraid you are no better than the worst of them. But you must come back and hear my news."

"I should prefer, sir," I said, suddenly facing him, "that you would hear mine."

There was something in my voice that at once attracted his attention.

"Certainly, if I can help you. You—"

"It is not about myself that I am anxious to speak."

"I am glad of that. I was afraid you were in trouble."

"I wish it were only that," I answered. "I am going to speak of M. de Saverne."

"Then I am unable to listen to you."

"But you must!" I cried, impetuously.

"Must!" he exclaimed.

"You do not know his character," I went on; "you do not know the stories they tell of him in Paris, and which, upon my honor, I believe are true to the last word. But it is not of that I mean to speak, though that is enough to close

your doors against him. This is different. This concerns yourself and—”

“Pardon me, I cannot hear you. It is impossible to discuss M. de Saverne.”

“I have no desire to discuss him. I only ask you to hear the truth.”

“The truth, sir, can take care of itself. I would have you understand me clearly. I have never listened to any story regarding those I call my friends. It is not permitted. While I find them true and loyal, I have still endeavored to exercise the same loyalty towards them. To listen to a slander is almost to approve it. I can hear nothing concerning the guest who has lately honored my house with his presence.”

“But if he endeavors to stab you in the back; if, while he is sitting at your table, he is plotting your ruin. This is madness, M. le Chevalier.”

“Then it is the madness of a gentleman, and I have never professed myself anything else. I have no desire to again refer to what has taken place to-day. I confess I was pained and shocked, but it is forgotten. Of all men, you are the last to say anything of M. le Marquis.”

This was almost more than I could bear, but even at that moment I felt the pity of it.

“Perhaps,” I said, “I also am under an obligation to him?”

"The most serious in the world—you are his enemy. That alone must close your lips."

"Then I can do nothing!" I cried, desperately. "You are bringing your misfortune on your own head."

"Then I hope I shall meet it like a man," he answered, with a smile. "There, there, do not think I am offended. There is a time in life when every trifle seems a tragedy, and an April shower becomes more serious than the deluge. Come back with me and help me to drink the other bottle, Anthony."

"There is no one in the world I honor more than yourself, M. le Chevalier. I do not think there is your like in France; but you have not done me justice. I found it hard to speak; I find it harder still to keep from speaking. I will only say one word more—watch M. de Saverne carefully. Good-night, sir."

I left him before he had time to say a word in reply, for I could no longer trust myself to act with moderation in the presence of what appeared to me a folly so astounding. But I had almost expected this; I had often heard him give expression to the same sentiments, but then that had seemed to me an amiable weakness which now appeared to me little less than madness. I felt that he believed my words of warning had been dictated by my aversion to M. de Saverne,

which I had taken so little pains to conceal, and that he believed I had no just grounds or reason for my denunciation. But I know that even had he supposed I was speaking with knowledge and certainty he would have acted in the same way and taken the same course. It was impossible not to honor his splendid faith in the honor and rectitude of others, supported as it was by his chivalrous and blameless life; but I was right when I called it madness. I felt that he merely courted his own ruin, and that it was useless to attempt to shake his resolution, or warn one who had resolved to close his eyes whatever might be the consequence of his blindness. It was pitiful; it was terrible; and yet I was utterly powerless. What steps I could take I did not know—nay, rather, I felt that I could do nothing but let the tragedy be played to its agonizing close. For, alas! I felt that it could only have one end. If Gabrielle had already attracted the attention of his majesty, I had already learned enough to know the way in which these things were done—I was not unacquainted with the horrors of the *Parc aux Cerfs*. The names of Guimard and Madame Bertrand were familiar sounds, and I knew that the despicable instruments who ministered to the vices and passions of their master would hesitate at nothing in the execution of their designs. For myself, the first movement that I made, the first

open step which I took in defence of Gabrielle and her father, would bring a knocking at my door, and the *lettre de cachet* which consigned me to the Bastille or Vincennes. There was no one whom I cared to consult in my perplexity; there was no one whom I was able to make the depositary of my suspicions and fears; I must face the situation alone, and act of my own hand. But how? I could not tell; but I felt that M. de Saverne was the pivot and centre of the plot, and by watching him carefully I might be able to keep my hand on the pulse of the conspiracy.

But I discovered that I must either be mistaken in this, or that the whole atrocious design was the creation of my own disordered fancy and unreasoning jealousy. For a whole fortnight from this eventful evening M. de Saverne had not been near the Maison Verte, and from all that I could learn had had no communication with Gabrielle or her father. The court had gone to Fontainebleau, but M. de Saverne was in Paris, and I saw him daily, but usually at a distance. Once we met face to face in the Rue du Bac, when there was no opportunity of avoiding a meeting. He was the centre of a little crowd of gentlemen—I recognized M. de Langeron and M. de Courtenvaux, and I was about to pass him by with my head in the air, for that is a trick I learned early, when he bowed to me with an effusive politeness

which took me entirely by surprise, and left me almost rooted in wonder. You must remember that at that time he was a fine gentleman, and I only a poor captain in a marching regiment, though nobly born and with excellent recommendations. But in those days there were marked distinctions of rank, and his recognition of myself might have passed for condescension, though I was very far from appreciating the honor he seemed anxious to do me. But one thing struck me: whether his civility was merely a mask by which he concealed his enmity, I had sufficiently impressed him to teach him the necessity of treating me with consideration; I own that I was weak enough to derive satisfaction from the thought.

II.—THE GRATITUDE OF KINGS

AS time went on I was lulled into a false sense of security, and I even began to smile at the wild fears that for a day or two had driven me almost to the verge of despair and had rendered me miserable beyond words. There was no change in the quiet life of the *Maison Verte*. The chevalier received me with his usual kindness on the two or three occasions on which I visited him afterwards, and never made the least reference to our misunderstanding. Gabrielle, indeed, treated me distantly, but I was satisfied that my words had made some impression upon her. She seemed to have become composed and thoughtful, and was no longer subject to those wild outbursts of gayety which had always charmed and sometimes startled me. But she had always been the subject of fitful moods, and I was, therefore, not so much surprised at the change. I made no attempt to return to the matter of our late conversation, and began to hope the incident had become altogether a thing of the past, and might never be recalled.

And then the storm burst in a clear sky without one note or sign of warning—burst and passed

so rapidly that I hardly awakened before the tragedy was completed, and my happiness in ruins at my feet.

It began in this way :

M. d'Estrades was an officer in the Garde Suisse, and my very good friend. Our acquaintance had begun shortly after Rocroi, and when I came to Paris we had renewed our intimacy until that had ripened into a fast and enduring friendship. He was a very fine and splendid gentleman — a lover of women, a daring gamester — but in all things a chivalrous and honorable man. He had, however, an inveterate love of gossip — a weakness which his peculiar duties about the court afforded especial facilities for indulging, and especially his intimacy with Madame de Hausset. It was to this that I owed the first hint of calamity.

I had returned to my lodging late in the forenoon when I found him awaiting my coming with some impatience. He had ridden post-haste from Versailles, and was anxious to return before five. He was booted and spurred, and carried his riding-switch in his hand. After our hasty greeting had concluded, he regarded me with an air of some solicitude.

"I cannot understand it," he said.

"What can you not understand?"

"Your new importance. I have come to Paris to inquire."

"You passed through the anteroom," I said, laughing; "you are now in the chamber of reception. Without doubt I am a person of importance."

"Pardieu, my dear Anthony, this is no trifle: I am perfectly serious."

"It is quite true, my friend, you have been frivolous too long. What is the matter?"

"The man who furnishes M. de Richelieu with a new jest, and keeps the abbé from the ladies for a quarter of an hour, has some reason to ask what is the matter, especially when he is a good sword, a fast friend, and flies low. If you cared a fig for any woman in France I could understand it better."

I was now perfectly grave; I felt that I had perhaps some reason to be serious.

"Will you tell me everything?" I said. "There may be something here that touches a friend of mine."

"Peste, it touches yourself. I would not have nearly broken my neck for any of your friends. I won't tell you Richelieu's joke, and I can't tell you the abbé's story, for I did not hear it, but I can tell you something of more importance. You know Madame de Sabatan?"

"I have never even heard her name. I am no courtier."

"She is familiar with yours."

"She does me too much honor."

"The devil she does. Wait till you hear me out."

"Well?"

"Madame de Sabatan is the mistress of the Duc de Vrillière."

"I am sorry that she should so far have forgotten herself."

I spoke lightly, for I now began to think that probably this was another of D'Estrades' fanciful tales.

"The mistress of the Duc de Vrillière is a person of some importance."

"I am sorry to hear it. The mistresses rule France."

"For God's sake, man," cried D'Estrades, in a heat, "listen to me seriously! Do you know who M. le Duc is?"

"I have seen him once—I neither know nor care."

"He is the head of the *lettres de cachet*."

"And then?"

"And Madame de Sabatan distributes them for him."

"And you suggest—"

"Nothing. I will tell you all. I met her yesterday at the house of Madame de Charolois. She had been busy over some state secret with M. de Saverne—by-the-way, he is no friend of

yours—and when she had finished she came over to me and began to make a hundred inquiries about you. I know she imagines I am acquainted with all the black sheep of Paris; but I soon gave her to know that you had done me a good turn when I needed it badly. You see, she is a coquette, and cares nothing for that misshapen deformity, and I find myself occasionally in her good graces. I hoped to get at the secret—one can get anything from a woman if he has time. I didn't; but I got enough."

"What did you get?" I cried, eagerly.

"A message for you."

"A message!"

"‘Tell your friend,’ said madame, ‘that Paris is not a healthy place in the month of June.’ Now, what does it mean?"

"A favor from M. de Saverne."

"Ah! Then there is no time to lose! He does not wait to strike."

"I am powerless. I can do nothing."

"You can do one wise thing; I have arranged it all. De Mazas, for my sake, will give you shelter in his house near Macon; and, in the meantime, I think I can engage to enlist the Pompadour in your favor. The Poisson is my friend."

"It is impossible. I cannot leave Paris."

"Then there is a woman, after all! I might have known as much when I saw the mark of M.

de Saverne's foot. By-the-way" — D'Estrades stopped and looked at me curiously, as though a light had broken upon him—"I wonder if I have found the clew to the mystery. They whisper for certain that M. de Saverne has found the king a new mistress, and that Le Bel is wild over her beauty."

"A new mistress!" I ejaculated.

"And now I remember I heard some one say that she was a countrywoman of your own."

I staggered towards him with a white face.

"For God's sake, do not tell me that!" I cried. "You have broken my heart. I care nothing for all the *lettres de cachet* in France; but I dare not face this! It is not true, D'Estrades?"

"My poor friend, I have no reason to doubt its truth; but perhaps—"

"Oh! it is too certain—there can be no other. I have seen it all. God help me!"

My emotion bewildered and blinded me for the moment. I sat down on a chair by the window and looked blankly at D'Estrades, who stood watching me without a word, but with pity written on every line of his face. Then, with a great effort, I mastered the passion that possessed me, and rose up with a quiet and fixed determination.

"I trust they will give me time," I said; "but I fear I may be too late."

"What will you do?"

"I will make certain that your words are true, and, having done that, I will pass my sword through Saverne's black heart."

"You are right. Can I help you?"

"There is no one can help me here but God. My friend, we may never meet again."

We shook hands and parted. It was two years before I saw D'Estrades again.

It is not difficult for you to imagine that I did not lose an instant in taking the first step towards carrying out my resolution. The strangest part is that my mind was now perfectly cool, collected, and clear. The agitation and suspense which had been my daily companions had completely passed away. I now knew the worst, and had nothing further to hope or fear. There was now no room in my mind for either the lifting of hope or the agony of despair. I was possessed by one dominant passion, and bent upon a single aim. When I had settled my account with M. de Saverne there would be no terror in the arm of M. de Paris. I would meet death with as much cheerfulness as a lover the embraces of his mistress. For I had resolved to kill him—a resolution which had now taken the shape of an imperative obligation which I owed to justice, and not the mere motive of private vengeance and personal hatred.

When I reached the gate of the Maison Verte

it was then for the first time that I remembered the chevalier. Hitherto my mind had been filled with one image and dominated by one feeling; but I now pictured the grief and despair that had already seized him, or was about to fall upon his head. I did not know whether the blow had been already struck, or whether I was to be the first to bring the tidings of impending evil; but in either case I shuddered to think of the agony I was about to witness. I knew that he could have borne with equanimity any other stroke of fortune, but here was the one vulnerable point that led straight to his heart. I knew his whole life centred in his daughter. She was the one object of his pride and affection. The blow must be terrible.

I stood hesitating with my hand upon the latch, hardly daring to enter. Then I pushed the gate open and went slowly up the path. I had almost reached the door when I heard his kindly voice calling me from the garden-house.

"The garrison has deserted me, Anthony, *mon cher*; I am quite alone. You have come to comfort me."

Then he had not learned. It was for me to break the tidings.

I found him seated in his favorite chair with the commentaries of Cæsar on his knees, who, he was used to say, always wrote like a gentleman

and a soldier; but I think he had been asleep, for I noticed that he held the book upside down. His *tabacière* and a bottle of wine stood on the table near him, but this had not been opened.

"I am glad to see you," he said, holding out his hand. "Pardon me that I remain seated, but I have been feeling the old wound that I brought from Ettingen, and am little more than a cripple."

"You are alone?" I asked.

"Altogether. Old men are dull companions for young and lively hearts. What is the matter?" he added, looking at me in some surprise. "You are ill?"

"I have had some bad news," I said, wishing with all my heart that I could spare him.

He rose to his feet with a painful effort.

"I am truly sorry to hear that. I hope that I may be able to help you. Is it money? You know my purse is light, but—"

"It is not money. I wish to God it were. Will you sit down and listen to me?"

"Willingly. If I can help you—"

"M. le Chevalier," I cried, "where is Gabrielle?"

"Oh, away with the rest of the world. The minx's head is full of courts and finery, and there is a new play of M. de Voltaire of which all the world is talking. M. de Saverne—"

"She has not gone with M. de Saverne—"

"Is there any reason why she should not? I hope, my dear Anthony, you will not continue—"

"Good God!" I cried, "I am too late."

"I do not understand this language. You have altogether lost your reason on this head. I am to presume your news is to the same purport?"

"M. le Chevalier," I cried, "I pity you with all my heart! I am the subject of no delusion, and I tell you—"

"Well, sir?"

"That Gabrielle is dead."

I had not intended to use these words, but I could not help it. They were forced from me in spite of myself. They were out almost before I knew that they were spoken.

He uttered a little, moaning cry, and rose to the height of his full stature with his hands held out to me imploringly and his face drawn and blanched.

"You do not mean that?" he gasped. "It is not true. Oh, God! my little girl."

He sank back in his chair and covered his face with his hands, while I stood watching him for a long time with such feelings as you can imagine. I think this was the most painful hour of my life. Then he rose to his feet.

"I am going to her," he said. "Help me to the house."

"M. le Chevalier, will you listen to me?"

"There is nothing more to say. She is dead."

"But you must listen to me," I went on. "I have told you the worst, but there is something more."

"There is nothing more. My hearth is desolate."

"God help us both!" I said, laying my hand unconsciously on his white, dishonored head—"you and me. But I have something more to do."

"You!"

He looked at me almost with an unmeaning stare.

"To avenge her."

"I do not understand."

"You remember that I tried to warn you and you would not listen to me. M. de Saverne—"

A light began to come into his eyes.

"A royal procurer! the king's pander!" I cried, bitterly.

"Great God! not death, but—but—my little girl—anything but that. And the man was my friend!"

"He was the devil hot from hell!" I cried.

"Adrienne's child and mine—my little girl—my rosebud—the only rose in my garden. You would not deceive me, Anthony?"

"Alas! sir, I have spoken the sad and sober truth."

"I have still the courage to listen to you. Tell me everything from the beginning—everything."

I told him all I knew, omitting nothing, while he sat opposite me with fixed, expressionless eyes, and his white lips twitching with a nervous flicker. I do not know whether he followed my narrative with understanding; I think he did not, for when I had finished he gave me no answer and made no movement. His eyes were still fixed on me with a stony regard, and his color was that of one in the article of death.

I poured out a glass of wine and reached it towards his lips, but he pushed it aside, letting his hand rest on mine a good while as he did so. Then he tried to rise to his feet, and I saw how almost in a moment his tall figure had been smitten and bowed.

"It is all over," he said; "help me to the house, my friend."

I passed my arm round him, and we went together slowly and without a word to the house.

When we reached his room he sat down and passed his hand once or twice across his forehead.

"Will you close all the shutters?" he said. "There is death in the house."

I looked at him for a moment, thinking that his mind had been touched by this sudden and terrible blow that had fallen upon him, but he spoke quite gravely and with evident meaning.

I confess the tears started to my eyes and rolled down my cheeks. I fell on my knees and kissed his white, trembling hands, and then went out, unable to say a word in reply. I was gone some time, and when I returned he was standing in the middle of the room with a sword in his hand that he had drawn from the scabbard. He had taken it down from where it had been accustomed to hang, over an armoire of black oak, and was examining the blade with attention.

He turned round when I entered, and looked at me gravely.

"I served France for thirty-seven years," he said, slowly, "and was eleven times wounded on the field of battle. I have kept my honor clear and bright, and hoped to carry it with me to the grave untarnished. I never thought to see the glitter of this blade again. It is a beautiful weapon, Anthony—Villars gave it to me the day I won my cross, and from that till—till now there never was a spot or stain on it or me—God help me! Nay, I can bow my head to this stroke without a murmur; it is the will of Heaven. But—but you understand?"

He held out the hilt of the sword to me, and I took it from him, bowing my head gravely.

"I think I understand, sir. With your own sword."

"With my own sword. And he was my friend.

The world is all wrong, Anthony. It is time I had gone home. But you will come back and tell me. You will not keep me long, for I am very weary."

I did not leave him for some time, but the interview was too painful for me to dwell upon it at any greater length. I could not have believed, had I not myself witnessed it, that so great a change could have taken place in so short a time. An hour before he had been wearing his old age with a gay courage and serene cheerfulness—alert, gracious, and overflowing with kindly humor; now he was merely a broken old man whose life was finished and whose hopes were dead. At this one fatal stroke it seemed, as it were, that he had fallen to pieces, and there was nothing left of the courageous soldier whose fine face and upright figure were so familiar to me. I could hardly have recognized him as the man I had once known; old age had overtaken him almost in an instant.

But I had still a duty left which I looked upon as sacred—M. de Saverne should not escape the punishment he so richly merited.

Though I knew that I was taking my life in my hands, I had determined that I myself should mete out his reward. It does not seem a small thing now, but then I went about it almost with

a light heart, finding in the thought the only means of escape from the anguish and despair that fought for complete possession of my mind. I cared nothing for the consequences of my act, or if I regarded them at all it was only with the satisfaction of thinking that I should have performed my task. I had only one fear. It was possible that I might be arrested before I had carried out my intention, but I knew that search would first be made for me at my lodging, and it would take some time to trace me here. It was also possible that I might fail to find M. le Marquis, but I had a clear presentiment that we should meet, which hardly left me any room for doubt.

I do not know whether you have ever had the same feeling, but it seemed to me as if I had foreseen everything that had happened from the beginning—or, rather, that at some time in my life I had played the same part and witnessed the same tragedy. In nothing had I experienced any sense of surprise; everything seemed to have fallen out as my mind had ordered and foreseen.

The same feeling accompanied me when I arrived at M. de Saverne's door. I knew exactly what was about to happen. There were three or four lackeys in the vestibule who stared at me on my entrance with a look of insolent inquiry, but I was so filled with rage and contempt that I felt that

a dozen of them could not stop me had they been so minded. For just a moment they maintained their stare of impudent composure, and then almost unconsciously drew closer together. There may have been something in my looks they did not altogether like. I advanced some way into the hall.

"Take me at once to your master," I said. "I must see him immediately."

"M. le Marquis is at supper and cannot be disturbed."

"I must see him," I said. "Conduct me to his apartment."

"It is impossible. Monsieur does not understand."

"Then I must find my way myself."

"If monsieur will give me his name," and the fellow placed himself in my path.

"I will give you this," I cried, flashing my rapier in his face, "if you say a word or move a step! I have an account to settle with M. de Saverne."

When they saw the glitter of steel and the determination of my looks they fell back, and I strode past them without once looking back, for I knew they would not dare to lay a finger upon me. As I advanced I threw open first one door and then another, but the object of my search was not there. Then I heard the sound of a low,

pleasant laugh, and I knew I was at length successful. M. le Marquis was seated at the head of a long table, fully dressed, and at the foot a little, fair man, who held the glass that he was raising to his lips suspended in his hand as I entered. There was no servant present.

As I came in I turned the key in the door, and walked into the centre of the room with my drawn sword in my hand. M. de Saverne leaned back in his chair, and, apparently quite unmoved, touched his lips for a moment with the laced handkerchief that he was holding. Then he looked at me through his half-closed eyelids, with the shadow of a contemptuous smile upon his lips. I knew then that this bad man had great courage, for he knew that his life was hanging on a hair.

"An unexpected visit, M. Dillon."

"I promised at our last interview that you should find me at your door."

"Is it taking too much liberty to inquire what is your business?"

"You do not know?"

"Every one wants so much nowadays. I cannot guess."

"That is a lie, M. le Marquis, and you lied to me before."

"It is always refreshing to hear the truth, but I must really discharge my lackeys, M. Dillon; you can talk to them in the court-yard."

He rose from his chair, and stood looking at me with one jewelled hand resting on the table.

"M. de Saverne," I said, "if you move a step I will pass my sword through your body. You may make certain this is no comedy. Now, sir, you will answer my question—what have you done with the daughter of my friend?"

"Then it is not plunder, but a woman?"

"I have no time to waste, M. le Marquis. Where is Gabrielle?"

"And if I say I do not know?"

"I shall refuse to believe you."

"You put the matter admirably. If I remember, you refused to believe me when I ventured to remark that mademoiselle was like other women. I shall not transgress again. M. le Bel, what is the name of the lady who has last taken possession of the well-beloved?"

But the white lips of the king's spaniel refused to utter a word. He watched me with a look that showed his abject fear.

"It is impossible for me," M. de Saverne went on, "to betray the lady's secret, but you may rest assured that she is perfectly happy in the complete attainment of her ambition. I wish we could all say the same. And now, sir, permit me to show you to the door."

"There is something first."

"Well, monsieur?"

"This!" I cried, striking him with my open hand upon the face. "Either you or I will not leave this house alive. It is nothing that you have broken my heart. I have come straight from the miserable old man who loved and honored you—you, a black-hearted hound of hell!—whose life you have ruined, and whom you are sending to the grave in anguish and despair. Say your prayers, if you care to pray, for the hours of your miserable life are numbered."

For a moment he had staggered under the weight of my blow, but he almost instantly recovered himself, and waited until I had finished speaking with something of his usual composure, but with a wicked look in his eyes.

"It is my own fault," he said, "that I did not take you in hand earlier; but you will be perfectly safe for some time to come. It is hardly worth while quarrelling for the little courtesan. Now, sir, I shall do you the honor of killing you."

But I knew he would do nothing of the kind. Our swords were hardly crossed till I knew that he was completely at my mercy. Heavens! how I hated him! What cause I had to hate him! All the time we fought I heard the chevalier's broken cry ringing in my ears and saw his gesture of despair; but I fenced—I, the best swordsman in France—as I had never fenced in my life.

Le Bel had risen from his chair, and put the

table between us; but he never attempted either to ring or call for assistance.

Step by step, foot by foot, I drove the marquis to the wall. He knew that he was mastered—he felt that he was doomed; but he never moved a muscle or changed the expression of his face. He tried desperately to regain his ground, but without success, and remained for a time entirely on the defensive. I rejoiced to think that he knew his case was hopeless. I hoped that he was suffering a little of that anguish he had inflicted. I knew there was no mercy in my looks; I felt there was no pity in my heart.

Then there came a loud knocking upon the door, and at that Le Bel began to cry out loudly. But assistance had come too late. I had exacted my vengeance. With that thrust which Colonna had taught me, and which only one man I ever knew had been able to parry, I passed my sword through Saverne's breast and almost nailed him to the wall. He threw up his hands, his sword fell ringing to the floor, and he dropped, a huddled mass, at my feet.

When I turned round the door had been burst open, and the chamber was filled by a dozen varlets, who had come running at the sound of the affray. But there was not one among them who had the courage to venture within my reach.

"The dog is dead!" I cried, for the sight of his

white face had brought no sense of forgiveness to my heart. "He does not deserve Christian burial."

They fell back from me on either side as I advanced among them, and turned round to look at them standing on the threshold, with my dripping weapon in my hand.

"M. le Bel," I cried, "do not forget the name of Anthony Dillon, captain of the Regiment of Clare!"

And then I passed into the cool evening air.

There was now only one thing left me to do, and then the counting of the cost. I had promised the chevalier that I would return when I had fulfilled my mission. That was satisfactorily accomplished, and now it only remained for me to see the heart-broken old man once more in his misery and loneliness, and relate what I had done; after that I did not much care what might happen. We pray that we forgive our enemies—I pray that gracious prayer myself, in the hope that my own transgressions may be forgiven—but I admit that in my petitions there has still been one exception which time has not removed. I have never forgiven M. de Saverne; I hope I never may. I think the thought that he was dead helped to take the sting out of my heart and break the weight of my misfortune. But I knew the news could not assuage the chevalier's grief—that nor any other; and I dreaded to

again renew our interview, with myself the sole witness of his sorrow. But I knew also with what impatience he awaited me — perhaps with hope that was almost more cruel than despair, and I did not loiter by the way. Indeed, I had returned long before he expected me.

I think he had not risen from his chair from the moment that I had left him, but had sat staring from the window that looked out upon the garden in a dead stupor of grief. But when I entered he rose and walked waveringly towards me with his hands stretched out. His lips were parched and dry, and I noticed, what struck me as curious afterwards, that he had not shed a tear. But his voice was thin and hesitating, and he spoke with difficulty.

“You have not brought her back?”

“I have not seen Gabrielle, sir, but—”

“Ah!”

“M. de Saverne is dead.”

“To be sure—yes—he deserved to die. With my own sword, Anthony?”

“With your own weapon, sir.”

“That is well. It is a good blade. Villars gave it me on the day—what day was it? Ah! yes, I remember it was on the day I won my cross. I am sorry that I was not there. How long did it last?”

“It was all over in five minutes.”

"I thought he would have held out longer, but God—did I say God? There is no God."

"There is a God, sir," I said, gravely, "who will exact vengeance." But I knew that I spoke to deaf ears.

"I believed all my life in God and love and friendship, and you see me now forsaken by them all in my old age—a lonely old man, Anthony. But I am glad you killed him. Where did you strike him?"

"Right through the breast."

"Ah! I know your thrust; I could never master it. That Roman was a cunning fellow. And Gabrielle—I suppose I must go on living, Anthony?"

I could not answer him.

"We will go to her room and say our prayers. What was that?—listen."

I could hear nothing.

"I thought I heard her coming. Are you sure you did not hear?"

"Perhaps it was the wind," I said, full of pity, "or the rain. It has begun to rain, I think."

"No, it was footsteps. But she will not come to-night. Ah! if I could only hear her footsteps I should die happy. How long is it since this morning? Are you sure you hear nothing? . . . I know it is only fancy; I am full of fancies. When you were away I fancied I heard her laugh-

ing on the stair, and she came and put her hands over my eyes, just as she used to do. She was a pretty girl, Anthony."

"She was a very lovely woman, sir."

"Ah! God in heaven! I am right. She is coming home."

He started to his feet, and stood trembling in every limb as I laid my hand on his arm. But it was not altogether fancy. I now heard distinctly the sound of footsteps on the path, and once a voice faintly but distinctly. What was its meaning? Then in the silence there came a loud knocking upon the door.

The chevalier broke from my hold, his arms extended and his head thrown back.

"Gabrielle, little one, I am coming! I am—"

The words were never spoken upon earth. He tottered forward two steps, and fell prone to the ground. I knelt down beside him, and saw in an instant that he was dead. I shall never, as long as I live, forget the sight of that white hair and staring eyes.

All this while the knocking had been going on, and I knew what it meant. But I had no thought nor wish to escape. I was ready and willing to answer for what I had done. I rose from my knees, and, walking slowly down the hall, threw the door wide open.

It was as I expected. I knew M. Berryer at a

glance, nor was he altogether unacquainted with myself.

I bowed gravely.

"I have been expecting your arrival," I said.

"I regret the necessity, M. Dillon. In the king's name," he said, placing his hand upon my arm. Then he added, in a friendly manner, "I trust it is not serious."

"I am afraid it is very serious."

"I hope you are wrong. I have another duty here."

"Another duty!"

"I have also a warrant for the arrest of M. le Chevalier Nugent."

"I had not expected that. He is not here."

"On your honor as a gentleman?"

"On my honor as a gentleman. But it is your duty to search the house. Will you permit me to lead the way? Allow me to conduct you to his room."

M. Berryer glanced at me narrowly, and then bowed his head in acquiescence. Two of the musketeers followed at his heels, and we went together down the hall. When we arrived at the door I threw it wide open.

"My God! what is this?" M. Berryer cried, in dismay. "It is M. le Chevalier!"

"No, sir, it is not M. le Chevalier. That is not my old friend. He has passed beyond the sorrows of the world and the ingratitude of kings."

Part IV

THE LAST SACRAMENT

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I.—HOW WE CAME TO THE MANSE AT KILMALLOCK

WHEN a man is being hunted and is fighting for his life his manners are not ceremonious, nor does he readily stand contradiction. He feels that the time has come to take the law into his own hands. This was exactly my state of mind when I walked into the change-house at Ardmuir, famished and worn-out, and saw the pair of ducks that were roasting before the fire with an appetizing odor. After seven awful days in the heather, with here a handful of meal, and there a draught of water mingled with mountain usquebaugh, neither of which I could ever endure, the sight of food stirred up in me the natural instinct of appropriation which underlies our social habits. It is true that I had no money to offer; I had not even anything to turn into money but Madame de Chantelle's ring, with which I had no intention nor inclination to part; but I had my sword and the villa-

nous countenance of the brigand who has had the hills for a bed and the bracken for a pillow.

Believing that these were not without a commercial value, I therefore entered the common room with what swagger I could assume, and, sitting down boldly at the table, made my demands with a peremptory air. But I was met with a point-blank refusal. It appeared that the gentleman up-stairs was about to dine, and the food which had awakened my desire was intended for him. Furthermore, the innkeeper informed me, with a significant nod, there was a company of Gardiner's dragoons at Inverkeith, and it was only ten miles thither by the short road across the hills. I might not care to meet them, for the lads had a bad character and a quick way with them.

"I care nothing," I cried—which at that time was hardly the truth—"for all the dragoons who ever saddled a horse. But I must eat and will. I am not wishing to rob your guest of his dinner; there is enough and to spare for two. Present the compliments of a gentleman from—from Glasgow, and say that I have invited myself to dine with him. Here is my card of invitation."

I flung my sword on the table, and cocked my hat with the air of one who refuses to be denied, or, rather, feels that he has the right to order. But even this failed to quicken the boor's inhospitable mind. The gentleman, who was a probationer

from Aberdeen, was unwell and had a mind to keep the privacy of his room. Being a sober youth, he kept no company with brawlers and Sabbath-breakers, and for my own sake I had better find some other lodging. This was all very well, but it was nothing to my purpose. I was perfectly satisfied with the means of entertainment here.

"Then there is no help for it; your probationer must go without his dinner. Besides, this is no dish for an invalid. It requires health and an appetite. You will see how admirably it suits me."

Though I spoke with a certain humor, I was desperately in earnest, for a starving man has no conscience, and I did not know when such another opportunity might be afforded me. I therefore prepared to help myself, and to withstand any resistance that might be made to the performance of a duty which I owed myself. For you will admit that though my proceedings may have savored of the strong hand, I had some show of right and sound reason upon my side, and in my position it was impossible for me to do otherwise. I was ready to drop—and in those days I had the strength and endurance of a dozen; the ducks were excellent, and all that stood between me and my dinner was a probationer from Aberdeen. It was not to be tolerated.

The man with the black patch—he was a most forbidding-looking ruffian—showed a courage that was not to be expected. He at once demurred to my easy freedom by snatching up an implement that was lying in the corner, and prepared to offer a strenuous resistance to my helping myself. But though he showed abundant good-will and some spirit, I soon showed him that that was not the way to wait upon a gentleman, and almost before he knew how it was done I had him by the neck and had thrust him headlong from the room. I had now a clear field, and there was no reason why I should not at once satisfy the imperative demands of my appetite. I accordingly turned to the fire, and had already laid the succulent birds on the table when the door opened and I turned round to face the intruder.

“I will talk with you when I have dined,” I said.
“In the meantime—”

“You will talk with me now, sir.”

I looked at the man curiously, for he spoke in a sharp and peremptory tone of which I did not altogether approve, and which was altogether foreign to the appearance he presented. He wore a rusty suit of black clothes, and a pair of buckles which may have been the mode before the Deluge, but have never been the fashion since, while his smug wig of red hair gave him the appearance of one who affected an air of extreme sanctity. In

any case, I dismissed him from my mind, and went on with my preparations composedly.

"You see I am engaged. If you will return in twenty minutes or half an hour I shall have time to listen to you. And, by-the-way—"

"Well, sir?"

"You might inquire whether there is anything to drink. Claret for choice, but—"

"By Heaven! this is too much!"

"I presume, sir," I said, surveying him with mock gravity, "you are the probationer from Aberdeen. If I am right in my conjecture, I admit it does not improve the temper to be deprived of your dinner, yet at the same time I might remind you it is unseemly to swear. You should know better, and for the rest I must ask you not to interrupt me now."

"Have you any further commands or suggestions?" he said, with a sneer.

"A spice of civility, a grain of courtesy," I returned, "might do you no harm. But we can talk afterwards."

As I have said, I did not regard him in the slightest, and anticipated no interference upon his part. I was therefore the more surprised when he came up to the table where I was seated and pointed to my sword with a gesture of contempt.

"Is that for use or ornament?"

I looked at the man in open wonder.

"I have used it upon occasion," I said, dryly; "but it is a dangerous toy, and you might wish yourself back among the good-wives of Aberdeen when I began to play with it. You see, it sometimes makes mistakes, and might take you for a man before it discovered it had let a stream of light through a parson *in futuro*."

"You have a nice wit," he said, "and so have I, on a fitting occasion. But not at present. Take up your bodkin and come out into the yard, till I see whether you have any right to my dinner."

While he was speaking my mouth was full of their barbarous oaten cake, a condition which certainly does not add to the facility of speech; but I honestly own that in any case I could only have regarded him in silent astonishment. It was not his words alone, but the air with which they were spoken—the cool indifference, the contemptuous insolence, the easy impertinence—which excited my surprise. I could say nothing; I could only stare at him with my eyes.

"Ah!" he said, mistaking, as I thought, my hesitation, "I see how it is. You are only a coward with an appetite—an Irish appetite—the most voracious in the world. When I saw you come tramping to the door like a bailie of Selkirk I knew we should have oaths and lies; but I thought your conscience would restrain you from laying sacrilegious hands on the viands intended

for the Church. For you have committed sacrilege, Major Dillon, and are no better than a heretic. Now, I—”

“You may be the devil,” I said, “and it looks like it; but I will talk with you in the kail-yard when I have finished my meal.”

At this he burst into a loud roar of laughter, and, sitting down upon a corner of the table, watched me, with his arms akimbo and a dancing look in his dark eyes.

“I seem to amuse you, sir,” I said, though without suspending my task.

“At least you owe me that.”

“You need not fear,” I said, sedately, “but that I will discharge all my obligations. Permit me to add that it is now eight days since I have dined, and I regret to keep you longer than is my custom. However, since you know my name, you may also be familiar with my habits and pardon the delay.”

“I can pardon anything for the sake of your appetite. It has improved since Preston.”

For the first time I looked at him attentively, and with an interest that was now fully awakened. I could not for the moment imagine how he had known my name; and, indeed, at the time I did not greatly care, for I was wholly indifferent to everything but satisfying my imperious craving for food. Now, however, my curiosity was aroused,

and I vaguely surmised that this gentleman was in the same plight as myself.

"May I venture to inquire your name?" I asked.

"That is a dangerous question," he said, with his mocking laugh. "I have no name. I am only a probationer from Aberdeen."

"But formerly?"

"Formerly, sir, I was known as the Master of Langdale."

"Langdale!" I cried, in astonishment.

"Your most obedient servant. I know I can trust you, sir." And with that he whipped off the wig of red hair and bowed to me with a mock gravity. I knew him in a moment, though we had never been intimate, and I own that I was amazed to find him here.

"My God!" I cried, "you are in a worse case than myself. You know that there is a price upon your head."

"Assuredly. For the first time I have learned its true value. But we seem to be both travelling on the same road."

"For your own sake, I wish you were travelling any other," I answered, gravely. "It is possible that I may be treated as a prisoner of war, though I have little faith in his Grace of Cumberland, but you—"

"Tut, it will be all the same a hundred years

hence. What would you have? I have played my cards and lost the game. I will not blubber over the stakes. I have lost everything; what does it matter?"

I looked at him gravely.

"It is a matter of life and death."

"It was a great game," he said. "We put everything on the table, and staked it on one royal throw—heads or tails, princes or beggars. I saw you to the last, Major Dillon. Is there any news of the prince?"

I do not know what view posterity may take regarding the attempt of his late majesty, who was formerly known as Prince Charles Edward, to recover the throne of his ancestors. For myself, I think there never was a feat more daring and glorious, equalled only by that of which the Greek historian Xenophon writes in his account of the march of the Ten Thousand. That a young prince, inexperienced in the art of war and unsupported by any adequate force, should have penetrated so far into the heart of a splendid kingdom, and returned with safety to fight a great battle, where success for a moment almost flattered him, must be a matter for continual surprise and admiration.

But whatever view may be adopted, the part played by the gentlemen of the Irish Brigade in that heroic campaign can never be forgotten.

They were the prince's right hand; they were the mainstay of his design. Of the seven men of Moidart, four were my countrymen. It is true the regiments of Lally and Fitzjames were captured in the Bourbon and Charité, but those who managed to escape the English armies were the foremost at Falkirk and the last to leave Drummonsie Moor.

I remember the feeling of elation and delight with which we learned that the prince was about to raise his royal standard and renew the ancient quarrel. And such a prince! There are still those living who remember Charles Edward at the height of his fortune, at the zenith of his manly beauty. Fortune seemed to have showered her richest gifts upon his head, and blown upon him with her most prosperous gales.

But my business is now to tell the story of the Master of Langdale. I have set down elsewhere my adventures in this memorable campaign from the time that I landed at Rye till I joined the prince at Penrith, and afterwards when we marched north and were broken to pieces at Culloden. I have there related the adventures which befell me after the battle, and will only say here that from the 27th of April till the 5th of the next month I lurked among those awful hills till, rendered desperate by hunger, I determined rather to run the risk of apprehension than die of starva-

tion in those bleak and melancholy wilds. I felt that in doing this I took my life in my hand, for I did not know how far my character as a gentleman in the service of France might protect me.

But whatever my own case, that of the Master of Langdale was a thousand times more desperate, and admitted of neither hope nor doubt. I knew his character; I had learned his story. For some reason the government evinced an extraordinary desire for his apprehension, founded, I think, partly on his character and influence, and partly upon some former dealings in which it was imagined that in conjunction with my Lord Lovat he had betrayed their interest and a trust they had imposed on him. This may be the truth, it may be merely the voice of rumor; but while he acted at the prince's side I have been told upon excellent authority that there was none so distinguished for the recklessness of his counsel and the audacity of his conduct. I had certainly set him down as a man of invincible courage, and now when I saw him cool and smiling in the wreck and stress of his fortune, his estate dissipated and a price upon his head, I could only admire his extraordinary resolution and contempt of circumstance.

There are men who treat misfortune like a partner at a *bal masqué*, and dance gayly down the road to ruin with a smile and a laugh. But this

was not the case with the Master of Langdale. Though he seemed to regard the vicissitudes of fortune with a smiling countenance and a scornful jest, there underlay the smile and the word a sombre earnestness, a black and settled melancholy. I felt, so to speak, that he only laughed from the teeth outward, and while he sat upon the table in the tavern, for all his wild and cynical raillery, I saw in him only a despairing jester intoxicated by the excess of his misfortune. That is one way to take the slings and arrows of adversity; for my own part I take them gravely, and with resolute hope to turn their edge.

But in the meantime we were both in pressing danger. It is true that Langdale was in his own country, and among a loyal and devoted people; but every village was garrisoned, every mountain pass was guarded, and there were patrols on every road. He had already run a hundred risks that he had faced with smiling audacity; he had even seemed to court the dangers which other men would have avoided, and found a certain pleasure and excitement in playing at hide-and-seek with Death—at least, so I supposed, or so he would have had me suppose.

I own, however, even at that time I became interested in the man and fascinated by his character. And although I felt my own safety was imperilled by throwing in my lot with his, it was not

long before I found myself consenting to embark our fortunes together, and forgetting his character in my desire for his company. At the same time, it must be remembered that I had lain solitary in the hills for more than a week and was always of a companionable nature.

We had withdrawn to the room which he occupied under the roof, and here I discovered that he had not been altogether regardless of his own comfort, for I found on a table some bottles filled with excellent Burgundy, and a very good bed with fine linen sheets.

"Duncan Macdonald is a Whig and my very good friend," he said. "We can drink here with safety. After all, it is a pity--"

"What is a pity?"

"That we cannot stay longer to squeeze happiness out of the liquor while it lasts; but we must move; there is no help for it. I am getting too warm here—the mountains will be cool enough."

"They have nearly driven me mad," I said, now somewhat heated by my second bottle, "and I have crossed some rough places in my time. Picture it, my dear master: that desolation of heath and rock and bog stretching round you like an ocean, and without as much hope as the castaway. 'Tis at once eternity and infinite space. And all the time you feel the hunters are on your track. You start at the piping of the curlew; you

tremble at the passing of a shadow; you pant like a fox, and lift up your ears like a hare. 'Tis the instinct of the hunted."

"Oatmeal and water!" cried the master. "All the time I shall ask myself what the devil brings me here. What had I to do with Charlie Stuart and Johnnie Cope? Why was I not snug at home with Aminta on my knee and a jolly fellow like yourself to help me to empty my cellars? It was excellent fooling while it lasted; but, damme, the game wasn't worth half the candle that we burned, and, as like as not, I'll be hanged to cap the jest."

"Permit me to differ from you, sir," I said, gravely. "When a rightful prince--"

"Tut! I want none of your beggarly Irish airs. What did you put in the venture? What had you to lose? You have not come out a crown the poorer for our failure. 'Tis no use crying over the milk that's spilled, it won't bring me back my bonny preserves and policies; but I'll be hanged if I stand a sermon."

"As you say," I answered, "you may be hanged in any case, but I will not permit any man to adopt the tone you have seen fit to use, and the sooner we come to an understanding the better."

At this he burst into a fit of laughter and struck the table with his hand. The wine, I think, was by this time in his head—I found afterwards he had no head for drink—and I began to fear we

should part company before the terms of our compact had been agreed upon. But so far from resenting my speech, he took it in excellent part, and seemed to find amusement in the resolution with which I asserted my position.

"Make room for the master of ceremonies, place for the gentleman of fortune. The prospect of hanging does not improve the temper, but henceforward I'll lisp like a page and simper like a lady of the bed-chamber. There, there, don't be a fool, Dillon, and look as though you wanted to quarrel at the first page in the dictionary of misfortune. Can we not get drunk sensibly?"

I pushed my glass to the middle of the table and rose to my feet.

"Pardon me, I have finished. It is time to decide what we should do. I should like to do it soberly."

With one of those sudden and unexpected turns which were characteristic of the man, he followed my example in rising to his feet, and flung his glass into the fireplace.

"You shall have no advantage over me, sir. I should have been content to drink a third bottle, but you must know I can accept advice, and follow a good example with any gentleman in Scotland. May I ask what you propose to do?"

"I shall make for the coast," I said.

"And then?"

"Trust to Providence and the chance of finding a vessel to carry me to France or Holland."

"Bah! Providence is a sour Whig, and will stick your head on a spike if you do anything so foolish. Look you, Major Dillon, I can read your mind like a book. You think you are not safe in my company; you are asking yourself already how you can get rid of me, and would willingly be under the shadow of Benan again rather than tied to the tail of my fortunes. I do not say you are wrong; I do not say you are right; but, right or wrong, the door is open. Take your way and I will take mine."

"You entirely misapprehend me," I said.

"If I do I will say no more. I am glad I do. Then your way is mine?"

"I am ready to listen to what you propose."

"I propose nothing; but I will tell you what I intend to do, and you may go to the devil if you do not follow me. You showed you had mettle at Preston with a spice of our Old Friend into the bargain, or I should not have troubled you with so many words. Duncan Macdonald, honest man, has kept me pretty well for a week or more, but he will be glad to see the back of me. I have always had good friends, and have always used them. Duncan will be getting into trouble, and I should not like that. I have another excellent

friend who will esteem it an honor to serve me, and I intend to make use of him."

"But he is not my friend," I said.

"All my friends are his," Langdale answered, coldly; "you need not doubt your welcome. The minister of Kilmallock—you see, I favor the Church myself—is under an obligation to me; he is my foster-brother."

"No doubt he recognizes the obligation," I said, with the shadow of a smile; "but we are likely to bring him into trouble. We are dangerous guests."

"That!" cried the master, snapping his fingers. "I am the head of the house, and in this country the tail follows the head. Evan Sinclair would kill the fatted calf and ring the kirk bell if Cumberland were at the door for a sight of his ill-used kinsman. And Evan is a good Whig, with a piety so fervent that no one would expect to find a reprobate like myself under his roof. *Vive la guerre!* M. Dillon, we will weather the storm yet, and get drunk together in Paris before another deluge."

I own I did not like the plan for several plain reasons, but it did not now occur to me that it was not both safe and practicable. I may say at once that I had in my own mind taken the measure of my companion, and fully gauged his character to my own satisfaction. Notwithstanding

his swift and headlong audacity, his flashes of passion and pauses of despair, in which he seemed careless of the future and reckless of consequences, I imagined that I could discern a reserve of prudence and caution by which he was likely in matters of importance to direct his conduct and protect his personal well-being. But of this I was certain, that he would not hesitate to sacrifice his friends or dependants to insure his own safety, and was not at all likely to consider their interests should they come in conflict with his own. Now, for my own part, I do not pretend that my life has been altogether blameless or my character free from faults. Life is, after all, a hard playground for the lame and the halt, and the strong man can hardly help setting his foot at times on the weak and infirm in the rough tumble of the world. But I have never forgotten that I was born an Irish gentleman, and though I have had my own share of misfortune, even beyond the common lot, no man for whom Anthony Dillon ever professed friendship could say that he had basely used him to serve his own ends.

It was this in the master's project that gave me pause, that ruin must inevitably fall upon the house that sheltered us should our hiding-place be discovered; and while I was anxious by all means to secure my own safety, I shrank from involving in my own fate the innocent and unprotected. I

therefore hung back, and made my objections with freedom and plainness, but the master merely laughed at my scruples.

"Tut!" he cried, with a flourish of his beaver, "you talk like a child. Kilmallock is the safest place in the world—'tis a hundred miles from anywhere. If a French ship is to be found on the coast we will find it there; and in the meantime my kinsman, who is a fountain of grace, will give you chapter and verse that you follow the Scarlet Woman and the abominations of the Lady of Babylon. 'Twill be dull but safe, and there will be danger neither for Evan nor ourselves. But 'twill be a long step and a bad road between Ardmuir and the manse at Kilmallock. You have still further acquaintance to make with the mountains, Major Dillon."

I was so little anxious to be thrown again upon myself without a friend or companion in misfortune that I suffered to be overborne, and permitted myself to be led by a companion in whom I reposed but little confidence. When I had consented to the scheme, I felt I should have refused; when I had taken the first step, I felt that the end would be disastrous. Once and again I was on the point of changing my mind, but looking out upon the bleak moorland and the wild splashes of unceasing rain I had not the heart to again resume my lonely and aimless wanderings in those

desert and trackless solitudes. If, as necessity compelled, I had again to take to the heather, any companionship almost was to be preferred to the dark and cheerless guidance of my own thoughts and the black melancholy which settles on the heart of a lonely traveller in the hills.

But while I regarded our undertaking with a serious gravity, the master, on the other hand, was in the most exuberant spirits imaginable. He might have been setting forth on a wedding journey, if one were to judge by his gayety of manner, and the air with which he borrowed ten pounds from Duncan Macdonald was beyond all praise. It was that of one conferring a favor, and conscious of an act of great condescension, rather than of a fugitive from justice, who was never likely to repay the loan.

It is not my intention to relate the circumstances of our journey through those bleak and awful hills, the privations we suffered, and the dangers we narrowly escaped. There is, indeed, one incident which might afford the reader some entertainment, and which throws some light on the master's character, but I am anxious to arrive at the main and central episode in this drama, and shall, therefore, only dwell briefly upon it.

We had been journeying together for three days, now making long and wearying detours,

skirting moorland valleys, and threading rocky glens, again boldly facing the mountain-side, and piercing the clouds that envelop them like a garment. I own that but for the master's presence I had been utterly overcome. He seemed to love danger and hardship as the presence of a mistress—an inconstant lover, but warm and passionate. For hours he would not speak, his manner distraught, his look melancholy and dejected; and then suddenly his mood altered, and, passing from the depth of despair, his speech startled me by its apparently unforced gayety and hilarity. I noticed that it was when I myself thought there was most reason for despondency that these wild flashes of merriment illumined our journey. I was certain that he was not consciously playing a part, but that these outbursts, sustained as they were through arduous toil and pressing peril, were natural to the man. There was, indeed, something theatrical in the effect, and always, perhaps, an edge of bitterness in the jests; but I soon grew accustomed to his manner, and found a certain pleasure in his society, though never free from suspicion regarding his sincerity.

On the fourth day of our wanderings it was our fortune to meet three Highland gentlemen, who, like ourselves, were seeking safety and shelter among the hills. They had found a very good hiding-place at the head of a glen, the name of

which I do not now remember. After we had exchanged greetings and news, they invited us to accompany them to their place of concealment. At first I was very unwilling; but Langdale overbore my objections with an imperious ill-humor which I was on the point of resenting, but I was now to a great degree in his hands, having, indeed, no knowledge of the country, nor having the means to continue my journey, being reduced to little more than my sword and my shirt.

We found the place a miracle of comfort and safety compared with the lodging to which we had grown accustomed, and there was no lack of food, warmth, and drink, all of which proved very acceptable. We had certainly no reason to complain of the hospitality which we met in the wilderness, for I remember the first night that we spent in this cavern we all grew so merry that we were within an inch of flying at one another's throats, and certainly at one time five swords were drawn over some trifling matter of precedence. But the storm passed without more, and we resumed our former footing of friendliness, accompanied by those barbarous libations to which one grows accustomed in the Highlands.

It was at this time the master learned of the treasure which Captain Stewart had in his keeping—a quantity of louis d'or which had been sent from France for the use of the prince, but which

had arrived too late to be of service. I could see that the matter exercised his mind, for he again and again reverted to it; and I was not much surprised when, after some pretty compliments, he boldly demanded a loan. I knew that he still had in his keeping the greater part of Duncan Macdonald's contribution, for he had been pleased to permit me to make all necessary disbursements during our four days' journey. But I did not think this request unnatural. I could not see why one who had already sacrificed so much and lost it, apparently with so light a heart, should not now receive a trifle in return. At first Captain Stewart demurred, on the ground that he had received the fund for a specific purpose; but the master's arguments were so admirable that ultimately he received twenty louis, and very nearly succeeded in getting thirty.

Then there happened the incident to which I have referred as illustrating Langdale's character, and which led me to regard him with renewed suspicion. In some ways it reminds me of the case of M. Wall, a countryman of my own, who, one night at Mademoiselle de Charolois's, borrowing an orange, matched it against some trifling stake, and, winning that, continued playing till he was the master of a considerable fortune. In any case, Langdale, having pocketed his loan, which he did with the air of one only receiving his due,

began to relate his fortunes at play, and finally proposed a game of cards. I then saw his design, and having no desire to be a party to it, endeavored to dissuade the others, who, however, were now in that happy condition that any excitement was acceptable.

I knew exactly what would happen, and it fell out as I foresaw. With brief intervals the play continued for two days, the players hardly taking time to eat or to sleep, and losing themselves completely in the fascination of the game. At first the stakes were trifling, but they gradually increased in amount, and it was not long before I perceived that the master's loan had been excellently invested; for the others were merely pigeons in his hand to pluck at his will. He alone never became in the least degree excited, but sat for hours together perfectly cool, with, indeed, an outward recklessness of speech and manner which, however it imposed on the others, did not in the least impose on me. Being merely a spectator, though I frankly admit against my will, for I always loved a flutter with fortune, I watched the players with impartial eyes, and I saw the master was merely laughing at his opponents. In any case, he won continuously, partly, perhaps, favored by fortune, but undoubtedly owing far more to his skill, till at the end of the second evening his winnings were over three hundred louis.

It was then that the astounding coolness and audacity of the man became conspicuous.

"I must not forget to return the ten pieces I borrowed, Captain Stewart," he said, slowly counting the louis and pushing them across the table. "You will find them right."

"You are not in the habit of discharging your debts so early," Stewart said, with a sneer. "We can make up your account when you are leaving."

"Major Dillon and myself must be afoot in an hour. We owe you a thousand thanks for your hospitality. I trust the times may have mended when I give you your revenge."

The three gentlemen looked at him in amazement, and I own that I myself was entirely taken by surprise.

"You do not mean you are leaving us to-night?"

"That, sir, is my intention. I endeavored to express it plainly."

"The devil you did! But you see you have won our money."

"Undoubtedly your money," the master answered, with meaning; "I should regret to think it was not yours. It is true I have won nearly three hundred louis fairly and with my own stakes upon the table. Is there any gentleman here prepared to say that is a reason to prevent me continuing my journey?"

"What do you say, Major Dillon?" Stewart said, turning to me, where I waited expecting to see the flash of sword-blades and a solution of this question of conduct in the way usual with Highland gentlemen.

"Only this," I answered: "as you are aware, I came here unwillingly and I leave unwillingly. It is true the Master of Langdale and myself are travelling together, but in this matter he must answer for himself and take his own course. I prefer to remain silent."

Langdale rose to his feet and walked to the mouth of the cavern.

"'Tis a fine, clear night," he said, "with a young moon and full of stars. If one of you will walk out with me as far as the burn, we can arrange the point in dispute—one first, the others afterwards. But it is a circumstance not to be forgotten that it is I who have won your money, and it is possible it may be said afterwards there were grave reasons why you were anxious to prevent my leaving. I only suggest this, though I am satisfied either way."

I could not but admire the skilfulness of this turn, which presented a new point of view, and in effect at once bound the hands of Stewart and his friends, who were apparently looking to another issue. The suggestion raised by Langdale's words left him at once master of the situa-

tion; and I saw that he recognized the fact by the increasing suavity of his demeanor. There is no doubt he carried off the matter well, and never once seemed to notice the dissatisfaction of the others, who were almost speechless in their vexation. Hardly another word was spoken while we made our preparations for departure; but I need hardly say in this affair my sympathies were entirely upon the losing side, and Captain Stewart made it clear on our leaving that he absolved me from any participation in the doubtful transaction.

"I wish you a fortunate journey, Major Dillon," he said. "I hope we may meet again in the same cause, when you may show the same courage. There is only one piece of advice I would give you—do not play at cards upon the road."

"*Cantabit vacuus*," I answered, flourishing my only piece of Latinity, that I have put in practice a thousand times, and feeling pleased with my jest. It is possible he did not understand the words, but there is no doubt he divined their meaning, for he glanced at Langdale with a significant look.

We were now once more upon our road, and certainly no two travelling companions were ever more ill at ease with one another than the master and myself. He was again plunged in one of his fits of sombre abstraction, and I was myself in an

excellent mood to quarrel, could I have afforded the luxury. For many miles we did not exchange a word, and I thought it very likely the first syllable we spoke would be the beginning of a serious misunderstanding. Indeed, I was more than once on the point of suggesting that we should each take his own way, but I was now absolutely penniless—the frequent lot of many of the best and bravest of my countrymen—and I was altogether ignorant of the country we were traversing. I admit that these considerations weighed with me, and prevented my natural indignation from finding expression; but it was impossible for me to assume a friendliness of manner where I felt only disgust and disdain. I have no doubt that Langdale knew what was working in my mind, for I could see him watching me from time to time from under his brows as we trudged silently side by side. I certainly took no pains to disguise my feelings, though I did not openly express them; and I was pleased to think he knew in what light I viewed his conduct. Indeed, my mind was strangely exercised regarding him. I knew that his courage was equal to my own, and that in wit and boldness of conception he was not my inferior—that in all the common qualities of manhood he could hold his own with any it had been my fortune to meet. So much I freely admitted. But I felt at the same time the

footpad and the cheat lurked somewhere in his heart, and that only the accidents of fortune decided his conduct, and not the voice of conscience and the laws of honor. A nature daring to rashness, an inflexible and stubborn pride that yet did not sustain him above meanness, an obdurate selfishness that would hesitate at nothing to gratify its ends—to these there was added a charming friendliness of manner and a candor of confession that if it did not evoke good-will, at least almost disarmed enmity. That he had united his fortunes with my own was the result either of caprice or some supposed interest, but I knew that upon the first occasion that arose he would not hesitate to sacrifice myself, or sell me with as little compunction as he had borrowed from his needy friend. Yet, notwithstanding the inherent vices of his character, I was drawn to him by some inexplicable charm, and while I regarded him with mingled suspicion and disgust, I found an infinite pleasure in his society. I desire to set this down here, as it will explain much that follows, though it may fail to altogether justify me.

As I have said, we had journeyed for a long time in absolute silence—a silence the more accentuated by the desolate quiet of the region we were traversing. I could not trust myself to speak, for now I felt we were both at the point

at which a word would provoke a quarrel. But it was evident Langdale was even less patient than myself. By a thousand signs I could see that he was boiling over with rage, and was only looking for an opportunity that he might give it vent. That moment was not long before it arrived.

The track which we had been following through the wilderness of rock and heath branches at the head of the glen to right and left, and here Langdale, who was walking a few paces in advance, suddenly stopped short, and faced me with a white, hard face. I also halted and regarded him gravely and firmly.

"My conduct does not seem to have gained your approval, Major Dillon?" he said.

I did not answer for a moment, as I was making up my mind.

"Well, sir?"

"There is no reason why I should not answer you. Frankly, I disapprove it strongly. But you are your own counsellor."

"I have not sought your counsel. It is not a matter of counsel, but of friendship and approval. Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed. We must now come to an agreement."

"That is impossible."

"Perhaps it is not so difficult as you imagine. In the long-run I generally have my own way.

There are two ways out of the difficulty—this or that. I do not care a damn which."

He whipped out his rapier with a flourish, and then pointed to the divided ways. I had no difficulty in divining his meaning.

"You had better put up your weapon," I said; "it is a great temptation, for I like the music. There is no reason in the world why we should fight."

"There is every reason. I am not in the habit of permitting a beggarly adventurer to sit in judgment on my actions, and pass his comments on my conduct. Do you think I am a fool? I heard your tag of Latin, sir, and I have seen your black looks since we left Knockawe. And wherefore? Because I refused to win any more money from the drunken fools who used the prince's money as their own."

"You were the tempter," I said, gravely. "You yourself knew."

"Well, sir, have I not a perfect right to take my own in the only way I could? The prince's! Bah! What are these beggarly pieces to the fortune I have lost in this service, like the cursed fool I am? Come, sir, make your choice."

"I have already made my choice."

"And that?"

"'Tis a week old," I replied, without the shad-

ow of a smile, "and was made in the tavern at Ardmuir."

"Well?"

"That I am too old a campaigner to quarrel with my commissariat. Plainly, I can do nothing without you, and I will neither quit you nor fight you. You have taken me up, and you will find it hard to shake me off."

He looked at me for a moment as though hardly understanding my meaning, and then with a sudden alteration of manner burst into a loud and boisterous laugh.

"By God! our heads may wag together in Carlisle yet. There are only two men in Scotland who could have given me the same answer, and they must not separate because they do not play at cards by the same rule. 'Tis best so. I believe you would have spitted me."

"I have no doubt I should have done my best to try."

I do not say that we were the better friends for our misunderstanding, for friendship between us was impossible, but from this time Langdale treated me with greater consideration, and showed some anxiety to stand well in my esteem. Whatever view he had formed with regard to my character, he now saw that beneath my free campaigning manner I was inflexible in the pursuit of honor, and lifted above all sordid considerations. I do

not think the natural claim of my birth had anything to do with his altered manner, though I was now at some pains to set out the ancient glory of my family, and the splendor of the stock from which I drew my lineage. On the other hand, I had reason to think he looked with slight regard upon the history of my illustrious house as a mixture of fable and hereditary pride, though he was now careful to refrain from openly expressing his incredulity, or awakening my resentment upon a matter that every gentleman must feel is part of his personal honor. I will only say here that there is but one aristocracy in the world, and that the claims of the Guelphs and the Hapsburgs to antiquity are but demands of yesterday compared with those common in the country whence I derive my birth.

II.—THE BOTTOM OF THE CUP

I VERY well remember the afternoon we came upon the hills above the hamlet of Kilmallock, and looked down upon the scattered cottages and the sea, stretching gray and cheerless towards the setting sun. There was a storm in the air, and the flying clouds, hanging low upon the waste of tossing water, were torn in driving masses from the settled gloom that stretched along the northern sky. The village lay almost at our feet—the thatched cabins of the fishing folk, the square church surrounded by its quiet congregation of dead, and, a little farther away, the gray manse, with its enclosed garden and blossoming orchard. Seaward there was no sign of a sail, and the master and I stood looking down upon the scene that spread before us without speaking a word.

I had prevailed upon him, though with some difficulty, to postpone our arrival till the evening, for I felt that our safety even here altogether depended upon our secrecy and vigilance, and I was unwilling to imperil our security by provoking curiosity and suspicion at the outset. For his part, he did not seem to understand the necessity

for this course ; but I remained so firm and pressing that he at length yielded, though, as usual, with an ill grace. I admit that to lie starving and weary in the sodden heather, with a keen wind and driving rain about us, and that in sight of rest and warmth and food, was trying even to my own patience ; but I did not for a moment relax in my good-humor, and laughed at our misfortunes with a composure and cheerfulness that was natural to me. Indeed, it may have been as much with a view to showing my own superiority to circumstances as from the real necessity of the case (for I do not hesitate to confess my weakness) that I refused to stir until the night had advanced some way, and the lights had gone out one after another in the straggling cottages. We then made our way down the hill, though not without some difficulty, the master swearing all the time at my folly and obstinacy, and I glad to think that our vigil was at an end, though I still had some doubt with regard to our reception.

We met no one abroad until we arrived at the gate leading to the manse, and here we found everything in darkness. And how it rained !

Langdale threw open the gate, and strode before me up the path.

"Evan has finished his prayers, and is safe abed !" he cried, with an oath. "There is a fine surprise in store for him.

“With a swinging health to Charlie,
And a rousing health to me,
I'll drink the health of all my friends,
Whoever they may be.’

Here is the devil's tattoo with a vengeance.”

He knocked loudly upon the door, so loudly that he awakened a thousand answering echoes, and we stood waiting for the response. He would have knocked a second time had I not held his arm; and then we heard one of the upper windows being thrown open.

“Who is there?”

“Open!” cried the master. “Open, in the name of misfortune and Charlie Stuart; open, or—”

“I must first know your name,” said the same grave and measured voice, and in exactly the same key.

“If you will descend, sir, we have a word for your ear,” I said, vainly endeavoring to restrain the master, whose wild spirits had apparently again broken loose.

“Upon my soul, Evan,” he cried, “I believe you have been drinking! You do not know your friends.”

“I thank Heaven. It is—”

“The same rolling stone—the luckless ne'er-do-weel, the dog with the ill name. Come down, good Evan, or we are dead men on your doorstep, and shame your hospitality.”

The window was hurriedly closed, and immediately I saw a small stream of light shining through the closed shutters ; nor had we long to wait until I heard a hurried step in the passage and the lock of the door being unbolted. "The return of the prodigal," said the master, with a sneer ; and then the door was thrown open, and a tall figure, clad in a loose gown and holding a candle, appeared on the door-step. The swirl of wind extinguished the light, and left us again in darkness, but not before I had time to notice the expression of joy and welcome that illumined the dark face and lighted the soft, deep-set eyes of the master's kinsman.

I drew back a little and left them to finish their greeting, which, upon Langdale's part, was conducted with an air of levity and a tone of mockery that I inwardly resented, but which was lost upon his friend. I had no longer any reason to doubt the warmth and sincerity of our welcome, and as I followed them down the passage I looked forward with confidence to a week of rest and quiet. We came into a long, low room with many books—folios and quartos for the most part—arranged upon shelves, and a harpsichord by the window. These I noticed when the candles were lighted, which the minister did in perfect silence and with trembling hands. I think he could not trust himself to speak in the full flow and tumult of his

feelings, for he stood for some time without a word when he had closed the shutters and turned to face us.

"My heart has been sore and heavy for you, my dear lad," he said, at length, again holding out his hands; "I am greatly rejoiced that you thought of me in your trouble and misfortune. God knows you are welcome to my fireside."

"I am the bad sixpence that always comes back," replied the master, airily. "This time 'tis a hanging matter, Evan."

"I read your name in the new's-letter, and I have prayed for you fervently and without ceasing. It may be that God has answered my prayers."

"Then 'tis something to have a kinsman in the Church. I do not doubt I shall need your prayers."

Being naturally observant, I read a swift look of pain upon Sinclair's face, that rested there a moment and disappeared almost as soon as it was born. But then and afterwards I was able to read his face like a book, for I never knew a countenance that so readily mirrored and betrayed the emotions of the heart. Standing there with the candlelight shining full upon him, he made a curious picture. His forehead was high and bony, with the hair something worn at the temples; his eyes were large and deep-set, with a quick and

luminous movement that seemed to betoken action rather than solitary thought, and his tall and angular figure moved with an awkwardness that I soon discovered **was** due to a natural deformity. I think it was his voice that struck me most, being very deep and **melodious**, though he spoke **with** the accent of **one** bred in the country and unacquainted **with the** polish of society. There was, however, something else that struck me as strange and curious. Notwithstanding the many differences between them—differences so great as hardly to leave room for comparison—I traced a strange resemblance between the kinsmen, though even now I cannot tell in what it consisted. Still, I found it there, and the issue, **perhaps, proved** that this fancied resemblance had **its foundation** in a deeper spiritual likeness.

Sinclair watched the **master with a** grave look where he stood carelessly **by the** fireplace and stirred the dying embers with **his** heel.

"Three years have not changed you much," he said.

"Three years? Three centuries! I call Major Dillon to witness—a respectable gentleman, whose fortune, like my own, is at present under a cloud—that for the last hundred years we have sounded every bog between this and Culloden, and felt the edge of every wind that blows. Three years! You can only measure time on the hills when you

have not tasted food since the day before yesterday, and see no prospect of a meal to-morrow. 'Tis all your fault, Evan. If you had never left Langdale for the piety of Glasgow and the flesh-pots of Kilmallock, I would have let Charlie Stuart fight his own battles and had my own bonny roof-tree over my head. You must do what you can for myself and my friend."

"I am pleased to see your friend," said the minister, simply, and with an awkward attempt at a bow.

"The Master of Langdale and myself are dangerous guests," I said, "in an honest household, and I warn you, sir, that our presence here may bring you trouble. It is only right that you should know that; but if, notwithstanding, for the sake of kinship and the claims of ancient friendship, you are willing to undertake the risk, I shall be beholden to you for a lodging till I find a ship or make other provision. I presume you can depend on your household; if not—"

"There is no risk which I would not incur—no risk, I mean, free from moral offence—on the same behalf. But I am assured you are perfectly safe here. Mine is a quiet household. Myself and my wife—"

The master suddenly swung round where he had been standing with his back towards us.

"Your wife!"

"I had forgotten that you did not know," Sinclair said, with a heightened color. "My marriage took place suddenly, and is not of ancient date."

"You were still a sly dog, Evan Sinclair!" cried the master, with an oath. "I warrant you have married your housekeeper. But 'twas hardly a friendly turn not to give me a chance of kissing the bride and drinking her health. We will do that now, dear Benedict."

"You will see my wife presently," Sinclair said, the color on his face deepening as he spoke, and his eyes flashing momentarily, "and I pray you—"

He stopped hesitatingly.

"Not a word, on my honor as a gentleman. She will never hear from me how you used to set the midnight chimes ringing, nor how we brought you home from Lucky Spence's in a barrow with the family Bible for a pillow. Ah! the good old times. You were all for riotous living in those days, Evan Sinclair."

"I need say nothing, sir," Sinclair said, turning to me with a feeble protest. "You know my cousin's manners."

"I have," I said, "been a fortnight in the Master of Langdale's company, and I already know how much he owes you, and is likely to owe you—I am sure he would not willingly cause you pain."

There was more meaning in my language than the words themselves conveyed. From the moment that Langdale entered the house there was in his manner a supercilious and contemptuous freedom, and in his tone a boisterous insolence which the circumstances did not warrant. I could see at a glance the relationship which had existed between them, and which, upon the one side, at least, there was clearly the desire and intention to continue. The humble relative had been the butt and tool of his brilliant kinsman; he had followed him from his childhood with a slavish admiration, and had been accustomed to bow to his whims and fancies till he had lost the power to assert himself in his presence. And yet, when I looked at them standing face to face—the one easy, contemptuous, familiar, the other abashed, shamefaced, self-conscious—I felt that if the time ever came when a great, insurgent passion should place them in conflict, the struggle between them might not be altogether unequal. Under the drooping eyelids there smouldered a latent fire of which the retired student himself might have no knowledge, but which when awakened would find food and fuel in his long reserve. I noticed also that he had borne the master's gibes with good-natured indifference so long as they merely touched himself—the obstinate habit of their long relationship—but I thought for one brief moment

he was about to turn at bay. That was when the master spoke of his wife, but the change of mood passed, and he apparently relapsed into his former condition of servile acquiescence. But I felt it was a straw in the wind, a bubble in the stream, the first air of a gathering storm. "Take care, my dear master," I thought to myself, "or you may learn a lesson of importance that cannot fail to surprise you. You may be warming your hands now; the time may come when you will burn them badly. I should not care to tempt Evan Sinclair too far—the family resemblance runs too close. In any case, I should refrain from treating the lady of the family with too much familiarity." But Langdale, as I need hardly say, had seen nothing, or if he had seen, would not have changed his mood or altered his manner on such trifling consideration. He bandied his jests with his old, reckless humor, making himself completely at home, and taking possession of the quiet study with an air of perfect proprietorship. Indeed, it was necessary to the man that he should have some one over whom he could play the master, and upon whom he could try the edge of his mordant and cynical wit. I did not forget that he had tried the experiment upon myself, but having found that I was likely to prove a dangerous subject, with a self-regard which was natural to him in his wildest folly, he had prudently

ceased, and now treated me only with respectful familiarity not perhaps unmingled with caution.

"The men of my family have still had cursed luck in matrimony," he said, when he was seated on the table—"matrimony and cards; and there never was a man of them that either the one or the other did not bring to perdition. If they did not marry a shrew or a strumpet, they went headlong over the dice. Upon my soul, I am burning with impatience to see my new kinswoman."

As he was speaking the door opened slowly, and standing in the shadow of the doorway, with the candle-light falling on her shining eyes and parted lips, we saw a vision of beauty that, hardened as I was, nearly took away my breath. I thought she had heard the master's last words, for there was a warm flush upon her cheeks, and she stood hesitating upon the threshold. Then she advanced a little, and with a sweeping, old-fashioned courtesy held out her hand to the master, who had risen to his feet, and stood looking at her in undisguised admiration.

"Allow me," she said, in an accent that had something foreign in it, "to add my welcome to Kilmallock. We are old friends, but—"

"But it has been my unspeakable misfortune," returned the master, bending over her hand and carrying it to his lips, "that we have never met

till now. I thought we had come to the desert—we have found a garden of roses.”

“You have learned to pay compliments.”

“With such a teacher I could learn anything,” answered the master, gallantly. “I no longer regret my misfortunes, since they have led me here.”

“I am sorry for your misfortunes,” she said, in her clear, soft voice, “and for the poor prince. Alas! the poor prince! I was altogether for his cause and the beautiful tartans. My husband and I did not agree, but we are now at one.”

“When beauty weeps for the unfortunate we forget our sufferings,” laughed the master.

In my own mind I thought it was the time to interfere. Like myself, Langdale had been astonished by this unexpected vision of loveliness that had suddenly dawned upon us, but that was no reason why he should indulge in foppish compliments and foolish phrases that were at once out of place with our condition and our circumstances. No doubt he meant nothing—it was merely his extravagant manner; but, though his words carried no meaning behind them, they had already created an effect, the result of which I fancied I might live to experience. In any event, I felt that a new element had suddenly entered into the drama, and that where I had merely

looked for incident and action I might find passion and humanity.

While the master bowed over the white hand and whispered his smooth speeches in the wife's ear, I had seen the sudden changes that had taken place in Sinclair's face—the swift look of suspicion, the sudden blaze of jealousy that lighted his sombre face till it glowed like a furnace. No doubt the wild heart-beat of that awful passion lasted only for a moment, for I saw the heat dying out of his face; but if I could read any man aright, a watchful fear, a sense of possible danger, had been left behind to rankle and torture. 'Tis always so with the man of books, but here—however, that is my story. I determined to say a word to Langdale on the subject when an opportunity presented itself, and in the meantime I attempted to lead the conversation into another channel.

“Madame is not English?” I said.

“Ah no,” she answered, with a glance at her husband. “Not altogether, but in part. My mother was of England, but my father was Canadian—of the French of Canada. But I am French at heart. I do not love the English; they are like their skies—gray and cold.”

“It will be madame's lot to bring sunshine to Kilmallock,” I said, following my custom of always saying a pleasant thing to a woman.

She looked at me with an air of coquetry inexpressibly charming, and then glanced at the master, who sat watching her with a broad stare of admiration, under which she dropped her eyes.

"It is very long," she said, with a pleased smile, "since I have heard the language of compliment. My husband does not approve. I have become grave and solemn. But we will sup now, and you will tell me the story of your adventures. I die to hear them, for you have suffered so much—oh, so much!"

I have still a clear recollection of that supper-table; I can still see the faces of the company. Sinclair hardly spoke a word, sitting with a grave, impassive face, and from time to time furtively watching his wife, who seemed unconscious of his observation, and made great eyes at the master and myself, like one greedy of admiration and flattered by our homage. I do not think I am naturally unobservant, but I could not fail to observe that only once or twice she seemed aware of her husband's presence. That only happened when she had forgotten herself in an outburst of merriment; the sound of her own laughter seemed to awaken her to a sense of her position. Then a look of *ennui*—I had almost said of pain—crossed her face, and she glanced at her husband for a second. But their eyes never met.

Certainly she made a very charming picture

in her simple white gown, with her red parted lips and shining dark eyes, filled with unaccustomed laughter—a charming picture, but out of place in the gloomy manse of Kilmallock, filled as it was with the shadows of a sombre Puritanism that looked on joy as a deadly sin and on mirth as the enemy of the spiritual life. She was like one newly awakened. Our advent had brought the sunshine back into her eyes, for as I watched her, with that swift instinct which is natural to some men and many women, I read the late history of her life—her periods of gloom, her fits of restlessness, her longing for sympathy, and the distaste with which she had already begun to regard her husband. But upon his side I had not far to look for the passionate love with which he regarded his wife—a love that had already filled him with jealousy and suspicion, and threatened the happiness of both a thousand times more than would mere indifference or even aversion. The deep passions of his nature, restrained and repressed by continual watchfulness and finding no natural outlet, had concentrated themselves on the light, unthinking woman, and gathered in intensity till they had taken possession of him. She had become part of his religion, and that was his entire life.

But the master had no eyes for his kinsman. Though I had already sufficient knowledge of his

variability of character, I found some difficulty in recognizing the moody and wayward companion of my wanderings. His speech was full of sentiment and charm, his manner complaisant and engaging, with an air of distinction that I had never before observed. Hitherto I had found a certain coarseness even in his pleasantry, but now there was no trace of that quality discernible. At the same time, without apparently intending it, he entirely ignored Sinclair and myself, and devoted himself to madame with an exclusiveness which evidently flattered and at times alarmed her. For myself, I said little or nothing, but listened to the easy flow of his speech with a curious feeling that at once bordered on admiration and contempt. There are certain qualities in a man which I naturally admire—courage, resource, dexterity; and all these I knew he possessed in abundant measure. But I felt while I listened to him that he did not care a straw for any one but himself, and that he was only acting a player's part for his own amusement.

We certainly formed a curious quartette as we sat together in that low-ceiled, gloomy apartment with the two candles spluttering upon the table, and the storm of wind and rain beating audibly against the windows in the pauses of the talk. The master had been telling the story of our adventures.

"There is nothing further to tell. The good cause is lost, the good swords are broken, and the gallant fellows are scattered and gone. Some are lying on the hill-sides—they are happiest—some are waiting for the gibbet, and some like myself, without a roof or a friend, are asking shelter and charity from kind hearts and open hands. But we do not complain; 'tis the fortune of war. There is one thing I am glad of."

"And that?" madame asked, with shining eyes.

"That I am alone in the world—that there is no woman to break her heart over me. My two hands are my best friends, and my sword is my wife and child. That is best for an exile and a pauper without sixpence."

"We are not yet out of the country," I said, grimly, thinking of the three hundred louis that he carried.

"I have heard," said the minister, slowly, "that there is a French ship on the coast which went north two days ago. Though I think you are safe here, it is not well that we should rely too far upon our supposed security. To-morrow I shall set inquiry on foot, and I doubt not, if such is the case—"

"There!" cried Langdale, with an impatient gesture, "you hear the whisper that is always sounding in the ears of the unfortunate. Pity me, Margot—we are cousins, and I may call you

Margot—here is the ancient Evan, my old friend, who would see the back of me at daylight and render a thank-offering to Heaven to have me safely over his door-step. 'Tis not to be wondered at; I am only a new story with the old moral."

"You are my brother and my benefactor," said the minister, looking at him with grave and solemn eyes, "and all that I have is yours, my house and land, my slender fortune, even to my life itself. Duty binds us to the unfortunate, but in your case there is the right to command, and in mine the heartfelt desire to offer. Nevertheless—"

"There is always a 'nevertheless' in life," cried Langdale, carelessly. "Wine is a jolly comrade, nevertheless it confounds you with megrims in the morning; cards are the enemy of care, but they leave the pockets bare as a common; woman is sweet and delightful, but she plays the devil—pardon me, Margot, there is no 'but' in beauty; it is absolute and imperial. If your wife will pardon me, Evan, I drink to the sovereign beauty of Kilmallock."

He tossed off his glass with a bow and a flourish, and a look of admiration in his dark eyes.

Sinclair hesitated for a moment, and then touched his empty glass with his lips. I caught a momentary flash of the inward fire under the

half-closed eyelids, and I saw a momentary hardening of the thin, eloquent lips.

"I have heard," I said, snuffing the candle, and looking Langdale fairly in the face, "that a wise man—no less than the Emperor Solomon, who was a miracle of wisdom and gallantry—declared there was a time to drink toasts and a time to refrain from drinking them. I am sure madame will pardon me if I say there could be no time more inappropriate than the present. We are surrounded here by a thousand dangers, not to ourselves alone, but to this roof that gives us shelter. Even to-night there may come the knocking upon the door that will send the Master of Langdale and myself to our own place, and bring such trouble upon your head, sir, as you do not apprehend. I would not alarm madame for the world, and I shall only say that I hope it may not be long before we hear of the ship of which you have spoken."

"That was never my way," Langdale said; "every day carries its own burden, and I don't refuse to sup to-night because I shall be asked for the bill in the morning. If I am taken—" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Such philosophy," I said, "does not suit my case, and I refuse to make the experiment; I will not be taken if I can help it. With your permission, sir, I shall now put my views before you,

and ask you to aid me with your judgment and experience."

In the conversation which followed I could not but admire Sinclair's quick wit and knowledge. I had set him down as a monument of simplicity—a dreamer of dreams—and in all the affairs of the world he was no less. But now, whether some sudden spring had been touched, or whether some natural gift not hitherto called into action had been evoked, he betrayed a clearness of thought, a swiftness of comprehension and insight that fairly surprised me, and at the same time a sound and balanced judgment, though expressed in the language of pedantry. He was in perfect agreement with me that we should not make a long stay at Kilmallock, though at the same time he took care to impress his belief in our perfect security, and over and over again expressed the pleasure it gave him to find us by his fireside. But I noticed that while he gave expression to his happiness his eyes dwelt more frequently on the master than on myself, and I set that down as a figure of speech which meant something different.

Langdale, as a person wholly indifferent, took no part in our conversation, or only interjected an occasional word in his light and flippant manner. For the most part he talked with the mistress of the house in a low voice, and I could hear

my own name more than once spoken in a tone which intimated that I was not receiving more than justice. But I am free to admit that did not affect me in the slightest degree. I had now only one anxiety: I had begun to regard Sinclair with respect and friendliness, and I felt that our presence under his roof could not bring him happiness, and might end in disaster. I speak honestly when I say that I already knew enough of Langdale to feel that he might go when he pleased for aught I cared, but the minister's study was no place for the tiger's teeth and claws, however the beast might purr and fawn and display his glossy coat.

You will think my fears and suspicions had travelled far in an hour or two; but I am accustomed to weigh men and measure their instincts and appetites, and I knew Langdale to the bottom of his heart.

At last I rose up and begged that I might retire to rest, pleading, as was only the truth, that I was tired and weary beyond expression. I saw a look of hesitation on Sinclair's face, which a moment after gave place to one of composure and dignity.

"In this household," he said, "it is our practice at the close of the day to offer our imperfect supplications at the Throne of Grace, and thank the Lord for His watchful care during the labors and

dangers of the day. I would not offend your conscience—I would not even encroach upon it; but it may be you do not object to uniting at our household altar, and laying your burdens at the feet of Him who is all compassion and tenderness.”

Now, I am a good Catholic, as were my gallant forefathers before me, and in that splendid faith I hope to die, a loyal son of the Church which is the light and glory of the world. But I did not hesitate a moment, and with my eyes on Langdale, who watched me with a mocking laughter in his own, I answered, gravely :

“Anthony Dillon never yet refused to join any Christian in his prayers, and God forbid that I should refuse now. My Church, sir, may not be yours, but the same good God watches over both of us. I will join you willingly.”

Though I fear I am not a religious man, that, I think, is the right spirit and the true creed—at least, it has always been mine, though M. l'Abbé, my good director, with the narrower view of a Churchman, does not altogether agree with me.

The form of worship was altogether novel and strange to me; but I still remember Sinclair's prayer and the power it exercised upon me. It seemed to me to come straight from his heart, and knock at the door of heaven with almost imperative insistence. Then the sterner mood

passed into one of entreaty and tenderness, and I knew that he prayed for his wife, though the whole household was included in his prayer. He must have been more moved than his wont, for his eyes were wet and streaming when he rose from his knees, though he did his best to conceal it. For myself, I was so much touched by the feelings he awakened in me that I silently bade him good-night and went to my own room.

But I had something on my mind which I wished discharged, and I waited till I heard Langdale's footsteps in the passage. Then I opened my door, and quietly entered his bedchamber after him. He stood for a moment, holding the guttering candle in his hand; and then, perhaps seeing something in my face, he laid it down on the dresser and turned round, regarding me with a curious look as I closed the door behind me.

"Well, what now?" he asked.

"I have conceived a great admiration for your kinsman," I said.

"Bah! you did not come here to tell me that."

"No, but it is well that you should know it."

"Is it? He should feel flattered. Permit me to thank you on his behalf."

"It is unnecessary," I returned, disregarding his sneer. "There is something more. His wife is—"

"Ah!"

"A very lovely woman."

"For once we are in perfect agreement. Still, you did not come here to tell me that."

"That is the beginning."

"I hope it is not a long story."

"No, I am usually brief and generally to the point. Now listen to me, for I mean every word I say. It is this: I will not stand by and see you destroy your kinsman's happiness, whose shoes neither you nor I are fit to loose. I will not, by—"

"Sir!"

"Oh, I am too old for these dramatic airs!" I said, snapping my fingers. "I have read the bottom of your heart about this light— But I tell you this: if you lift a hand or move a foot towards the dishonor of that poor soul who loves and honors you, I will pass my sword through your black heart, so help me God! Good-night, sir."

As I turned to leave him I saw the look of blank amazement on his face, and for the first time since I had known him he had not a word with which to answer me. I closed the door behind me, leaving him standing in the middle of the room, and retired to bed very well satisfied with myself and with what I had done. I did not know how far he might disregard my warning, but I knew if that warning had no weight with him nothing else would. There was also a hope

lurking in my mind to which I did not give expression. I have never entered into a quarrel to which I was not compelled either by honor or necessity, but I should not have been by any means ill-pleased if the words I had used with due deliberation and unmistakable emphasis had led to an invitation to the hill-side. That would have arranged the matter simply and to my satisfaction, but it was not so fated to fall out.

Contrary to my expectation and almost to my hope, Langdale met me the following morning with his usual condescension, and made no reference to the mode in which we had parted the evening before. It is true there was no change in his manner, but I saw with some degree of satisfaction that he no longer paid the same assiduous and marked attention to madame. This was, indeed, plain and evident, and flattered me with the belief that I exercised some influence over him with whatever hauteur he might affect to treat me. Nor was I the only one who noticed this alteration. Sinclair was evidently relieved, and showed his relief by an accession of high spirits quite unusual with him; but his wife, who had, I doubt not, prepared herself for a renewal of compliments and gallant speeches, was less satisfied. Her disappointment was obvious to me, and I inwardly smiled at her ill-concealed displeasure, while at the same time I felt the pity of

it. I had met such women before ; with a passion for admiration and hungering for flattery, vanity leaves them a prey to the first worthless adventurer, and makes shipwreck of their frail, unstable lives even in the harbor of watchful love. And there are men, good men, who love such women and embrace ruin for their sakes.

I own that I was entirely thrown off my guard by Langdale's manner, and I even began to think that I had, perhaps, attached a needless importance to his unmeaning gallantry, and had allowed my former knowledge of his character to carry me too far in my fears and suspicion. In any case, we fell into a quiet and settled habit of life, which continued for a considerable length of time, and was unbroken by any incident of importance or circumstance worthy of narration.

The minister's household consisted besides his wife of one female domestic and her husband, who, being old and attached servants, were undoubtedly trustworthy, and, possessing all the peasant's shrewdness and wit, were a source of additional safety. For myself, I spent my entire time in Sinclair's room, and never showed abroad except at nightfall, so that Sinclair and myself came to know one another very intimately. With a clearer knowledge of his character I can hardly tell you how he affected me, but I no longer wondered at the manner in

which his wife regarded him. There were times in which for hours together he was sunk in a black and profound reverie and never uttered a word, haunted, I thought, by spiritual doubts and terrors which rendered him oblivious to everything that passed around him. At such times his gloom was absolute, his eyes fixed and expressionless. But when the mood passed and his mind cleared, his native simplicity manifested itself with overflowing kindness and untutored wisdom, and, though I am a poor judge of this, with unaffected piety. And yet even at such times the effect he had upon me was a curious one, and I could never altogether divest myself of the feeling that beneath this calm and placid exterior there lay a depth of passion, the force and strength of which I could only surmise. Langdale went his own way with a perfect sang-froid, and never for a moment seemed to realize that he was a fugitive from justice, and that a price had been placed upon his head. He spent his days among the fisherfolks in their boats, or solitary with his gun on the moors, and appeared to take a cynical pleasure in the character he had assumed as a student of divinity. But we seldom met one another, and he seemed to avoid my society. Of the French ship we heard nothing more, and though continual stories of the merciless vengeance of Cumberland found their way across the moun-

tain barrier that shut us in, we remained unmolested, and I found a certain charm in the unbroken monotony of every peaceful day. At first the time passed slowly with myself. You see, I had been on the march since I could handle a sword, and every day had passed in a rough tumble with fortune that gave me little space to sit and rest. But now being thrown, in a large measure, upon myself, I thought it time to see of what stuff the inside of books was made, and it was now that I acquired that knowledge which has made me, if not an accomplished writer, at least the sympathetic companion of men of letters. Sinclair was not averse to act as the director of my studies, and though he thought me fastidious and critical, especially in regard to the poets, for whom I have little respect, I think he learned from me nearly as much as he imparted. Many books are excellent, but they must be digested by one who brings to bear on them an enlightened knowledge of men and a wit sharpened by contact with the world. In any case, books are certainly not the whole world, as the philosophers would have us suppose.

I have reason to believe madame did not love me, though I confess I did my best to win her confidence. In that I altogether failed, and she avoided me as one whom she either feared or mistrusted with such persistence that I finally

gave up the effort. I am sorry now that I permitted myself to be so easily diverted, but it might not have averted the final catastrophe even had I persevered. That was being prepared before my eyes, and I admit I was so blind that I saw nothing until the storm was ready to burst.

One afternoon I was seated alone in the minister's room, he having gone over the hills, as he said, to see a sick parishioner, when Langdale came in, a thing he had not done for some time. It was the hour between daylight and dark, but a sullen rain was falling with a dreary and monotonous drip, and a sombre mist blown from the hills covered the windows like a curtain. The candles had not been lighted, it being still too early, but a fire of drift-wood was burning brightly on the hearth. I had settled down comfortably, and was sorry to be disturbed.

Langdale went over to the bay-window and stood drumming with his fingers against the panes for a good while. I could only wonder why he had left madame in her parlor. Then he turned round, and, coming over to the hearth, stood with his back to the fire.

"Do you believe in hell, Dillon?" he said, at length.

There was something in his voice that made me regard him with attention.

"I have never doubted it." I spoke gravely.

"You have never spent an hour there?"

"Sir!"

"Bah! I might have known. The good Catholic crosses himself when I name the myth of the theologian, the wild invention of the priest. Hell is here, man—here, where we sit and drink and laugh and pray. It consumes us with flames; it maddens us with its thirst; it tortures us with its agony; it—good God! there are no flames like those of the despairing soul that has lost its way and cannot find a place of rest. You have never sweltered there, my excellent Anthony."

"God forbid!" I cried, speaking with my whole heart.

"I hope you never may. Your hell and purgatory are vulgar in comparison. Upon my soul, Dillon, I wish I was dead, and it was all ended."

Now this is a habit of mind with which I have no sympathy, and though I did not know how far he was playing a theatrical and how far a natural part, I answered with some temper.

"There is an easy way out of that difficulty. Why do you come to me?"

"Because I cannot trust myself—because—. For the love of Heaven, let us get out of this to-night—now."

"This is pure madness," I said.

"Madness! 'tis staring lunacy. We are all mad, I tell you, every man jack of us; even the

smug parson with his long prayers and intolerable sermons, who came into the family on the wrong side of the blanket, has so much of our blood in his veins. He has saddled his devil with the grace of God, but you will see he will bolt some day. But the little devil below stairs—"

"I will listen to no such language," I said, rising to my feet. "Tell me plainly what is wrong."

"What is right? The whole world is wrong, and I am sick of it all. The devil made it, and there is nothing anywhere but falsehood, treachery, and talk—talk."

"You had better," I said, for my mind was travelling fast, "make your confession to your kinsman."

He looked at me for a moment, and then burst into a fit of loud and boisterous laughter.

"He is a good fellow, Dillon—the only being in the world who ever cared a straw what became of me, and I have treated him worse than—pshaw! Evan was worse than a madman; he should have followed my example!"

"An excellent example!"

"A damnable example, sir; but he would never have married, at any rate."

"That is his own business—not mine or yours."

"Is it not?" he cried, with a sneer.

"No, sir, unless—"

"Well?"

"Unless you are guilty of a greater crime than I suppose; or is it," I went on, a new light breaking upon me, "that this cur's whine has some meaning, after all, and that you—but I think not. Even you would not have dared."

"A civil tongue, if you please. What! I would dare anything. I would advise you not to provoke me too far, for the devil is driving me post-haste, and I won't stand crossing. I tell you, man, this house is killing me; its air chokes me; its silence maddens me; and its piety— Good God! its piety is driving me to distraction. I hardly know what I do or say. Let us get out on the hill-side. I want air and room to breathe."

We stood facing one another with the firelight falling full upon him, and I could see that he was deeply moved. But I own that, for some reason which I could not fully explain, instead of feeling sympathy for him, his manner and language awakened my suspicion and placed me upon my guard. I knew that it was no trivial cause that had brought him to me in this fit of despairing penitence, which I knew to be transient, however genuine for the moment. I felt that I had been remiss in my watchfulness; that with my knowledge of his character I had yet allowed him to go his own way, and while it was my duty to be alert and vigilant, I had been blind and almost apathetic. With this feeling regarding him, and a bitter

sense of my own shortcomings, I was in no mood for the vamping to which he had treated me, and I answered, shortly :

"I am a plain man. I have no love for heroics, and prefer to come to simple facts. I will not beat about the bush. You remember I warned you when we first came to Kilmallock, for I read your heart that night like an open page. Now, sir," I went on, slowly, "it is my belief you have disregarded the friendly warning I gave you then. No ; you will listen to me. I do not know how far you have gone, or whether I am now too late, but, before Heaven, I am going to hear the truth."

"You will know nothing that I do not choose to tell."

"Then choose."

"It seems you do not know me yet."

"Oh, I think I know you very well. But I will be no fellow in your sins or partner in your iniquity. If you have injured the good soul whose roof shelters us, and who cannot protect himself—you, his friend, the brother of his heart—I will kill you like the dog you are. Now, sir, the truth."

Langdale came a step nearer to me, and then stopped, as if he had changed his mind.

"You are vastly concerned," he said, in his cold, hard voice, "for my friend's wife ; she has found a fitting champion. If you will take up your sword,

sir, and come down to the change-house, we may find occasion over a bottle of wine to settle this matter. I am in the very humor for blood-letting."

"I am to understand, then," I said, sternly, "that this is a plea in confession."

"You—tut! you are to understand nothing, or anything you like."

"I am to understand, at least, what I am to fight about."

"The world is wide; you have your choice—a horse, a dog, a shoebuckle, anything or everything. I do not care the crack of my finger what you fight about."

"But, in the meantime, what about your kinsman's wife?"

"You thick-witted mercenary, do you think I will bring the virtuous Margot into our amusement? We can say that I did not like the fashion in which you wear your hair. The world can very well believe that."

"I could not have believed," I said, going over to the window-seat where my sword was lying, and taking it up, "that even you would have done what I now know you to have done. Could you not let the vain, slight creature alone, for the sake of the man who loved her and you? Could you not spare to ruin and dishonor him and break his heart? Oh, I know your ways and your fine

words. Now, sir, I will follow you willingly, and I think we shall both turn our backs forever on the desolation you have wrought. Sinclair—"

The swift leap of the fire had settled into a steady red glow, and the after-part of the room was filled with shadows. I had not seen while I was speaking that the door was lying open, and that Sinclair stood upon the threshold, himself like a wavering shadow. How long he had been standing there I did not know; but I felt that he could hardly have failed to catch the last words I had spoken, and even he could hardly fail to understand their application and meaning. I think Langdale had seen him sooner than myself, for it was due to a change in the manner of the former that I paused as I had done. But while I stood, quite overcome and confounded, he met him with his frank, outspoken air.

"'Tis a pity you were not here sooner, Evan. Dillon and myself have nearly come to blows over the first great theological question that ever troubled mankind. Dillon holds with the woman, I with—the early Church; but I am a poor theologian. You will not keep me waiting, Major Dillon?"

I turned my back on him as he went out, and walked over to the fireplace. There was a kind of dreary silence in the room. Only the high clock in the corner ticked monotonously, and the

storm cried outside like a creature in pain. I did not look up; I could not speak. Then I heard the door quietly closed, and I raised my head. Sinclair walked unsteadily towards me, with his hands stretched out, his tall, ungainly figure bent forward, and his eyes bright and fixed. He came close up to me till his face almost touched mine, and I heard him breathing heavily. Neither of us spoke. It was a curious thing—I found myself counting the ticking of the clock.

Then he laid his hands upon my shoulders, his eyes riveted upon my own.

"You are a man of honor, Major Anthony Dillon?"

I remained silent.

"Men of honor do not lie willingly."

"Not if I could help it, for the Kingdom of Scotland."

"Though you are a papist I know you are a good man. You will tell me the truth. You were speaking of my wife—of Margot?"

His voice was measured and hard, but I could feel his hands, which he had not removed, trembling on my shoulders, and they burned like fire.

"You heard my words," I answered, wondering at his cold, impassive face.

"Yes; I heard your words from the beginning to the end—word by word—line by line. I could

now repeat them all. They are not nice words. Do you believe they are true?"

Now I did not know what to make of him, but I did not like the look in his eyes. The coldness with which he had learned the terrible truth—if it were the truth, and I hardly doubted it—astonished and shocked me. I could not understand it at all. But I had yet a good deal to learn.

Accordingly I answered, and with perfect frankness.

"Upon my word, I do not know."

"You are a man of the world—I am a simple scholar. You would not take away the character of a woman—a wife—an honored wife, at a guess?"

"You ask me to speak the truth. I have done that."

"She is my wife; he is my brother and friend. It is strange and pitiful. Now I will tell you my secret."

For the first time he took his hands from my shoulders, and then he spoke in a whisper, first glancing nervously towards the door.

"You spoke the truth. Your bow, drawn at a venture, went straight to the heart of the truth."

"Then you knew?" I cried.

"I was, nay, I am, a plain and simple man, Major Dillon, of no skill or cunning. I had a hard and unloved youth, but the Lord made my

path plain and brought me here. I thought to pass my life alone among these hills. I had no other hope. I had no other wish. Then out of the storm and the tempest one winter night God sent me something to love and cherish. I took the shipwrecked girl to my heart, and set her there as the heathen sets his graven image, till I think she took the place of the Almighty in my worship. I know now it was sin. Ah, sir! do you think I would not watch over what I loved so much? I followed the motion of her eyes, I watched the drawing of her breath, and I knew I did not hold her heart. But I thought that that would come. I prayed with fervent supplications that it might come. I knew that I was as a man set apart, who had neither gifts nor graces, but I dreamed that infant fingers and the prattle of a child—just God! it is all over; my hearth is desolate.”

He threw up his hands with a gesture of despair, and reeled back with a low moan like a stricken animal. I am sure he would have fallen to the ground had I not caught him in my arms and supported him to a chair by the table. He sat there with his head leaning on his arms and a noise in his throat like a man gasping for air. Though the spectacle of so much anguish touched me extremely, I own that I felt a certain relief when he had thus given way to his passion. His

former unnatural calmness had almost terrified me, and, as I say, I had not known what to make of it, but now I thought he had laid his heart bare before me. Yet I could say nothing; I felt that no words of mine could afford him consolation or assuage his agony.

At last I ventured, though after a long time and without knowing why I did it, to lay my hand on his shoulder. He looked up with a start; his eyes were quite dry and bright.

"Ah, you are here still! I thought I was alone."

"I pity you with all my soul."

"And yet he drew his milk from the same breasts. I loved him, but he has no heart—a stone for a heart. You could not have believed that he would have robbed me of my one joy!"

"Mr. Sinclair, you must face your sorrow like a man, and the time will come when you will find consolation in your religion. For myself, I came into your house with the shadow of your misfortune, but we will go out together. I am going to bid you farewell."

He rose to his feet and caught me by the arm.

"You must not go!" he cried, wildly; "I forbid it—I, the injured husband, the outraged friend. Do you think that carnal weapons will blot out the stain or heal the bruised and broken heart? No implement of war will be lifted in

my cause; no life will be endangered in my defence. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' He has spoken, and He will deal with the guilty man in His own way."

"Nevertheless," I said, "I cannot remain under this roof. If, indeed, you desire that he should escape—"

"Truly I desire it. The Lord said in the old time that the adulterer should be stoned with stones, and even yet will the wicked be punished and his seed blotted out forever. You are something in my debt," he went on, in a tone of entreaty; "I gave you shelter in your misfortune and took you in when you had no friends. In turn you will show me kindness and abide with me till—you see, they believe me blind and simple—only you know my heart is torn, and the fire on the hearth has gone out forever. You will promise that you will close your eyes and bear with me in my great grief, which God may help me to conceal."

"You do not propose that we should continue to live as though nothing had happened?" I said, aghast.

"I might answer that we are enjoined to forgive till seventy times seven; but I do not say that, nor do I wish you to believe that there is yet any sense of forgiveness in my heart. That is stone—mere stone. But I have heard a voice,

and a way has been prepared. There will be no more sin under this roof. You will promise me?"

I remember this occurred upon Friday, the 28th of June. It was impossible for me to explain Sinclair's language and conduct otherwise than by supposing the sudden blow had unsettled his reason, a conclusion to which his manner lent some weight. It was not that there was anything violent in his speech or wild in his actions, but from this time his eyes were those of a man haunted by visions and filled with awful purposes. He moved about the house swiftly and noiselessly, and seldom spoke. I do not think he ever rested. Whenever I awakened at night I heard him pacing the length of his room and his voice raised in supplication or reproach, though I was unable to distinguish the words. In two days his face had become like the face of an old man, and there were white streaks in his hair that I had never seen before. I noticed, too, that his wife trembled in his presence, though he did not fail to treat her with his usual gentleness. When he came into the room she seemed to shrink in terror, and followed his movements with a kind of breathless expectancy, as though waiting for some sudden change or outburst. I do not know whether Langdale noticed anything; it is likely that he did not. But it was evident that he failed to understand my conduct, though he asked for no ex-

planation, and treated me, when he spoke at all, which was seldom, without any alteration in his manner. Indeed, I was not sure that I had acted rightly in yielding to Sinclair's entreaty, for I could not see how the drama was going to end. But there was now an immediate prospect of the arrival of a friendly ship—the same in which I afterwards obtained a passage to Brest—and that, if no other reason, made me unwilling to quit this unfortunate house, where, you can understand, I was by no means at ease. Knowing what I did, I could see every passion and emotion, and while the others moved blindly and at cross-purposes, I, who was only a spectator, saw the chords that moved them, and, so to speak, heard the speeches that remained unspoken.

But events travelled rapidly, and I had not long to wait for the end. That I did not myself see, and I can only imperfectly speak of what I have heard; but I know enough to set out clearly all the circumstances. We are all wise when it is too late, and we frequently wonder at our blindness, that we did not see what was plain as our hand before the blow has fallen. Certainly that was now my own case, for I was quite convinced, notwithstanding his outward calmness, that Sinclair's mind was deranged, and that he was not responsible for his acts. But no madman ever was more cunning, or concealed his plans with such dexterity, yet with

such simplicity. Besides, it was impossible for the mind of a sane man to conceive the means by which he accomplished the end he had in view, or follow the reasoning by which his poor, distracted brain justified his acts. Yet I do not doubt that he felt himself the instrument of divine justice, and that he imagined there was a peculiar sacredness in the means he employed.

As I have said, the storm burst on Friday. The following Sunday was the day on which the rites of the communion were performed in the parish church. I am not familiar with the ceremonies of this sacrament as they are conducted here, but I know it is regarded with peculiar veneration, and that it takes place at stated intervals throughout the Christian year.

Upon this particular Sunday Sinclair's manner was distinguished by an additional gentleness. Upon that morning he took his wife in his arms and kissed her upon the forehead and the lips. He had even shaken hands with Langdale, a thing he had lately avoided doing. I own I wondered at that; but there was something which gave me even greater cause for astonishment. He pressed him—he even insisted with a show of affection—that he should accompany them to the church. It might be, he said, it was for the last time, and that a prolonged separation was soon inevitable. I cannot repeat the words he used,

but while he was speaking his wife looked at him with a veiled terror in her eyes, and I think she would have protested, but was unable. Langdale, however, who appeared in high good-humor, consented with a laugh, and I watched the three walking together down the path from the manse, and towards the village church, with an indefinable sense of dismay. It appeared to me too horrible and unnatural, and I could only wonder what it meant. I was soon to learn.

The rest I tell as it was related to me, and I am not certain whether my narrative is quite accurate; but broadly the circumstances are as follows:

The minister's wife and Langdale sat together in the same pew beneath the pulpit. There was nothing noticeable in the minister's manner during the early part of the service, except, perhaps, a certain nervous restraint and watchfulness. It was only when he began his sermon that a look of wonder spread over the faces of his simple congregation, and they began to conjecture there was something wrong. Certainly a more wonderful sermon never was preached in a Christian church. It turned upon the justification of Jael. He began to describe the scene with a minuteness and a force which took away the breath—it passed before their eyes; it was enacted in their presence. For the preacher seemed to see it as he spoke—the smile on the face of the murder-

ess, and the joy of duty in her heart; the guest sleeping in the quiet tent; the stealthy step and shining eyes; the first deadly blow; the gasp of agony and the long silence. She was the hand of God; the instrument of divine justice; her act was that of faith and inspired duty. God smote no longer in the whirlwind, or destroyed the wicked with His fire. He chose the human instrument to do His will and mete out punishment on the blood-guilty. Men might condemn, but God approved in the secret chamber of His wisdom. Let the evil man look to his path, and the unrighteous take heed to his going. Divine vengeance was upon the watch, and the weak and lowly would bring the proud of heart to naught and tread the stiff-necked in the dust.

There was a great deal more which I do not remember, but all the time he was speaking his wife never took her eyes from his face, looking at him with a white, scared countenance. When he had finished, Langdale whispered something in her ear and smiled, but my informant, who was there and saw him, thought he had never seen any one look less happy. He may have thought this, however, from what occurred immediately afterwards.

Then began the ceremony of the sacrament.

The minister's hands were now trembling, and his face was deadly pale but for two bright spots

on his cheeks. His lips moved all the time, and he could not speak plainly for a dryness in his throat. He faltered rather than walked from the steps of the pulpit.

A silence filled the whole church.

When he was about to hand the cup of the sacred blood to Langdale he did what no man had ever seen him do before—he made the sign of the Cross. I am told that holy symbol is looked upon as a devilish superstition, and two or three cried out in horror at what they looked upon as sacrilege. But the minister never paused or hesitated. “‘Drink this,’” he said, “‘in remembrance of Me,’” and handed the master the sacred vessel. There may have been something in his face that made Langdale pause before he drank, but he certainly paused while one could count ten. And then he put the cup to his lips and drank slowly. No sooner had he returned him the chalice than Sinclair stepped back, and, looking at his communicant for a moment, dashed it to the ground with a loud cry. Then he fell upon his knees and threw up his hands in a sort of frenzied ecstasy.

“The adulterer,” he cried, “will be stoned with stones! The judgment of God has descended on this people and on this house! Behold He is among you!”

I have no words to paint the terror and sur-

prise that filled the people in a moment. Then Langdale lurched heavily forward, his eyes staring with fright and pain, the blue veins standing out on his forehead, and his hands clutching at the seat before him. They ran to lift him where he lay, breathing heavily and gasping for breath, and then, clearing a little space round him, they watched him die.

No one heeded Sinclair, and when they came to look for him he had disappeared. I am told that some days afterwards his body was found at the foot of a rocky precipice on Bendhu, with the silver cup hidden in his vest. It is very likely. I never heard what subsequently became of his wife.

Part V

THE CASE OF M. DE LUSSAC

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

3. The third part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

PART V

THE CASE OF M. DE LUSSAC

I DO not know why Madame la Comtesse imagined that she could employ me in the design which she first intended. Certainly there was nothing in my character or conduct which could have led her to believe that any promises of favor or advancement could induce me to act otherwise than as a man of honor and a gentleman of birth and reputation. It is true that I had rendered her late husband a service at once delicate and hazardous. But then the favor was upon my side, and an Irish gentleman, even in exile and poverty, does not care to remember the benefits he himself has conferred. I can only suppose that fear and affection had rendered her desperate, and that she caught at this faint hope as the only means of averting a great and crushing domestic calamity. It may, indeed, be that in her inexperience she imagined that one who had sold his sword would also sell his honor, and that a broken captain in Clare's French regiment observed another code and followed other maxims

than he did at home. To a man in distress much may be forgiven; to a woman everything. It was this thought, bred of suffering and disappointment, that first induced me to pity her misfortune, and finally to tender my services in a mode honorable to myself. I do not reproach myself that I acted in the manner I am about to set out, though I unfeignedly deplored the consequences, and still remember the incident as among the saddest and most tragical in my experience.

I must own I was surprised beyond measure when madame called upon me. I knew her by sight, and recognized her now in spite of the thick veil she wore. Indeed, no disguise could perfectly conceal the gracious carriage of her person and the splendid dignity of a manner which can never be acquired by art, however sedulously it may be cultivated. Other great ladies I have met, but none who bore themselves at once with such natural pride and simple dignity as Madame la Comtesse de Lussac.

I say that I recognized her at once, and at the same time I began to wonder on what mission so splendid a personage had sought the lodging of a humble soldier of fortune like myself. For at that time I had not stumbled upon the lucky accident that placed my feet upon the golden ladder that leads to favor. To tell the truth, I was reduced to the very brink of despair. Since

my release from the Bastille, consequent on the affair of M. de Saverne, I had got no employment; I had not a louis in the world, and was at my wit's end to settle my tavern bill on the day of my departure. My friends did not press to offer me assistance, and I was too proud to let any one know the condition to which I was reduced. No doubt I was a gentleman—that could never be forgotten—but in my present condition I could very well see how wide was the chasm which separated the lady and myself. Therefore, while I stood bowing before her, I knew that she had come to seek a service at my hands. I could not, indeed, imagine its nature; I could not make the vaguest guess as to what her errand might be. I was at once flattered and perplexed.

She regarded me steadily for a moment through her veil; then she slowly withdrew the covering from her face. That I could see was very pale. Her lips trembled slightly, and her eyes had the look of one who would be confident and strong in spite of her emotions. Otherwise her manner was perfect, and her voice when she spoke was under the command of a supreme and imperious will. It was both sweet and clear, and yet it did not fail to remind me of the distance that lay between us.

"M. Dillon?" she inquired, not deigning to notice the chair which I offered.

"At the service of Madame la Comtesse de Lussac."

"You know me, then?"

"There are few who having seen madame once would fail to recognize her again."

She made an impatient gesture with her hand.

"I have heard my late husband speak of you. You are both brave and prudent."

"Most men are born with courage, madame; prudence sometimes comes with years."

"And poor? Forgive me, it is no idle curiosity that prompts my question."

"I am rich, madame, in my sword and my honor."

"That—" she cried, with the same impatient movement.

"Still, that is something. There are few Irish gentlemen in France much better off than myself; there may be one or two worse. I admit, my sword and honor have not filled my purse."

"You would be rich?"

"None more willingly, though I see little prospect of it. His majesty has many servants, and favor does not always go by merit."

"Then also I think I can do something."

I am not a brave man in the presence of a woman, but I regarded her steadily. I could clearly see that she was appraising my value, and considering how far she could use me for the pur-

pose that filled her mind and charged her heart. By an instinct that I cannot define I felt that the proposal that trembled upon her tongue was one that I could not accept without dishonor to myself, and that the bribe she was about to offer me was the price of some shameful act. That, I say, I felt by instinct, but I did not in the slightest degree betray my feelings by my manner. I merely bowed and was silent.

"It is possible," she said, slowly, "that I hold a regiment in my hands, and more, perhaps, who knows—the baton of a *maréchal*."

"I fear, madame, they do not make *maréchals* out of poor soldiers like myself. Some day, indeed, if I am not knocked upon the head and the king forgets, I may command a regiment."

"And meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile I wait upon Providence with fortitude."

She looked round my narrow room with an air of disgust, and, indeed, I must confess that my surroundings were by no means such as befitted my birth as a gentleman or my deserts as a soldier. But I had been too long accustomed to lie down with undeserved misfortune to quarrel with my lot, and the dingy squalor of my lodging had never before struck me so forcibly as now. The walls, devoid of wainscot or hangings, were quite bare, and had been scrawled upon by my com-

rades in a language I am fain to hope my visitor did not understand. The floor was stained with the marks of frequent feasts; the chairs stood upon hesitating limbs, and the pallet in the corner, fit enough for a rough soldier, was not, indeed, a bed of state. But I felt, and I still feel, that a man is greater than his surroundings, and though I experienced some shame at the humble show I made, I was not, therefore, depressed.

At my last answer she looked at me with some hesitation.

"You have said you are poor. Will you permit me to help you?"

"Most willingly, when I know the price you ask me to pay for your assistance."

"You can help me—I am only a woman—I cannot help myself."

"I would help you, madame, without reward or favor."

"Ah," she cried, "but this is different! You do not yet understand; and yet it is a small matter to a brave man like yourself—a bagatelle, the amusement of an hour."

"The service will then be all the more easily rendered."

"I know that I can trust you," she said, for the first time sitting down upon the chair that I had before vainly offered, and placing her hand upon the table.

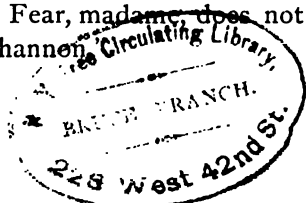
"You know M. de Saverne?"

There was fear and hatred in her voice, but the question itself startled me beyond expression. Certainly I had cause to know him; certainly I had cause to remember him. From the hour that I had left him lying for dead on the floor of his own dining-room I had thought of him every day for nearly two years. It was only when I had been released from my confinement that I learned he had recovered, and the feelings with which I had regarded him when my wound was still fresh had not in the slightest degree abated. I hoped at some future time to repay him the debt I still owed him, but like a gentleman, and not as a mere bravo or assassin. Since my release he had pursued me with hatred and malevolence; but I knew that he had fallen out of favor, and his power to do me an injury was by no means equal to his will. In any case, the account on both sides was still open; but I did not think it necessary to discover my mind to Madame de Lussac, or speak of my former relationship to M. de Saverne. I therefore replied guardedly, though with perfect truth.

"Yes, I have met M. de Saverne."

"You, at least, are not afraid of him?"

"Afraid! Not the least in the world—him nor any man. Fear, madame, does not grow on the banks of Shannon."



"He is not your friend?"

"He is certainly not my friend."

She looked at me with a white, set face, and went on in a low tone, in which pride and entreaty were strangely blended.

"He has done me a great wrong; he has brought shame and disgrace on the name I bear. The injury is of such a nature that he can atone for it with nothing but his life. You understand?"

"What you say, madame, I understand perfectly; but how it concerns me I do not understand."

"Must I speak more plainly? You are poor and friendless; you have little hope or expectation of fortune; you would be rich and honored. I will make you rich beyond your dreams—I will set you on the road to fortune—I will protect and favor you, and in return you will—remove my enemy."

"What!" I cried, almost doubting my ears.

"Oh! I do not mean a secret blow. You are a gentleman, and so can find a hundred ways. Insult him as you will. It is not hard to provide a ground for quarrel. You cannot fail to kill him."

In the excess of her feelings she had risen from the chair and caught me by the arm. The passion which she had kept under the most perfect mastery and control until now burst forth unchecked, flashed in her splendid eyes, and rang in her

indignant voice. It seemed as if she had forgotten me, and remembered only her hatred and her injuries. I knew now why she had sought me out in my retirement and obscurity, and I grew white with shame and indignation. I withdrew myself gently from her grasp and regarded her fixedly, though without any show of the just anger which I felt.

"Madame," I said, courteously, "I do not doubt you labor under a misapprehension regarding my character and reputation. It is true I am poor, but I have sacrificed my future to my loyalty. It is true I have sold my sword to a stranger, because my king—an exile like myself—no longer needs my services. But in all my misfortunes I have never forgotten I am still a gentleman—nay, more, that I can trace my descent from kings and the sons of kings. At the end of his journey Anthony Dillon has no desire to herd with bravos and assassins."

"But you do not understand—"

"That you have offered me your favor and protection in a private quarrel. M. de Saverne is my enemy also, open and avowed, but now I dare not even defend myself. The offer you have made me ties my hands and sheathes my sword even in my own quarrel."

I spoke with perfect frankness and firmness. She saw there was no appeal from my resolution ;

at my words her pride and reserve were broken down, and a look of despair swept across her face and settled there in stony anguish. I saw that she tried to speak, but could not say a word. Her white fingers, glittering with gems, clutched the veil she held, and I saw the rich lace rent in her unconscious hands. She stared at me with her eyes fixed upon my face, her hope quite dashed to earth, her heart filled with bitter disappointment. I do not think she was even angry; her mind was filled with the thought of the intolerable disgrace that threatened her, and the hopelessness of now averting it.

There was a prolonged silence that I would fain have broken, but could not.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "My son is lost!"

"Your son—the Vicomte de Lussac?"

"My only son! It is terrible!"

I had entirely forgotten that madame had a son, though on a moment's consideration I now remembered that M. de Lussac had recently been appointed, though still little more than a youth, to a position of some splendor in the royal household. I had seen him once or twice—a forward lad, the creature of a thousand airs, and most unduly filled with a sense of his own importance. His illustrious birth (though not even so ancient as my own) and enormous fortune had filled his

sails with prosperous breezes, while I, that was twice his age and had an honorable record, lay becalmed in utter and complete neglect. I had no sympathy for the vain and insolent young coxcomb, but the tragic grief of the woman, so exalted and beautiful, filled me with profound compassion. Though she had even insulted me by her proposal, her anguish had quite disarmed my natural indignation, and I felt eager and willing to assist her. I could not resist her tears.

"If madame," I said, gently, "will so far honor me with her confidence she will find me silent, and she may find me useful. Though I am unable to accede to your wishes, I have myself suffered so much that I can feel for another in distress. Nor is it impossible that what is dark and doubtful to you may be plain and legible to a rough soldier like myself. Nay," I went on, "I do not court your confidence, but, as I have already said, you will find me willing to assist you."

She looked at me doubtfully.

"If I could trust you—"

"Madame, you have already trusted me. My character is known."

"I will tell you all!" she cried, suddenly; "I will trust you! All his life I have lived for my son—my only son. I have placed him before everything. A man cannot dream how a wom-

an's heart clings about the son she loves. But, alas! she cannot keep him always at her side. He must go out into the world and play his part with other men. But still she loves him. Ah, God! how I have loved him!"

She paused for a moment in the excess of her emotion.

"He found friends who were not so faithful as his mother; he was young and easily guided—not vicious, only weak. And among his new friends was M. de Saverne. I warned him, but my warning was in vain, for young men scorn the wisdom of experience. They drank and played together; they were inseparable, and my son lost large sums at cards of which I knew nothing. What happened then I hardly know, but yesterday, in a public place, in presence of a crowd of gentlemen, M. de Saverne accused my son of questionable practices—called him a rogue and cheat—and struck him with his glove upon the face. And it was not done in a moment of passion or resentment, but coldly and deliberately."

"This is a serious matter," I said.

"It is monstrous, it is intolerable. The disgrace is killing me. It is not my son's name only—it is the honor of my house. You see, I cannot rest. And he is only a lad, an innocent boy, who knows nothing of the world."

"M. de Saverne knows enough for two," I said,

grimly, thinking of my own tragedy and the craft and duplicity with which he had pursued myself. Without knowing the details of the story, I could trace the master hand of M. le Marquis in attacking where he himself might be liable to accusation; and I did not doubt this was only his summary method of dropping another pigeon whom he had plucked.

"But this is serious. M. de Lussac is old enough to take his part with men, and, like other men, he must defend his honor or pay the penalty. There is only one thing left."

"And that?"

She waited breathlessly. I saw the eagerness of hope leap into her eyes.

"He must protect his character with his sword, madame. Among men of honor there is no other course; it is part of the code, and to decline would be to stamp him forever as guilty and a coward."

"I know 'tis ruin!" she cried, with her eyes bright and fixed.

"I can say nothing more," I said.

"Then you cannot help me. There is no hope for me. I must tell you all. My husband, as you know, was an honorable gentleman of unstained character and courage beyond words. On my knees I offered my son his father's sword, and prayed him, as I never prayed to God, to keep his

father's name and mine unsullied. I beat the air; I spoke to ears of stone; I could not move him. What have I done that I should live to say it? My son has no heart; he is a trembling coward. He will not fight."

"A coward!"

"I am his mother, and it is I who speak the words. I had rather ten thousand times see him dead than thus dishonored, though I love him better than myself. My prayers could not touch him; his own disgrace could not move him. He owned the truth, and I am here and miserable."

I was myself overcome by the emotion which she displayed, for she had altogether forgotten herself in the grief and humbled pride that shook her heart. There was no longer any degree in rank or distance of place between us—she was only a suffering woman. I could make no reply; I could not even express my sympathy. The case was curious and pitiful beyond any that I had known. I had been accustomed to believe that all men were born with courage, and that especially when rank and birth obliged. How many poor ploughmen have I seen march cheerfully to the cannon's mouth and take death by the hand with a joyous salutation or stern composure! But that a gentleman should prove a pitiful coward and resign himself beneath an accusation which I was certain was false, and an in-

sult I believed wholly unprovoked and unmerited, was almost more than I could believe. Certainly M. de Saverne had an ugly reputation as a duelist, but the consequences were so grave and serious that I felt sure fear alone had not prevented M. de Lussac from acting like a gentleman. I spoke, therefore, almost on the spur of the moment, following my own interests and guided by my own feelings.

"If," I said, "madame will place the matter in my hands."

"What can I do?" she answered, helplessly.

"You must gain time—that is imperative. Your son is indisposed, seriously unwell, and must be removed to the country without delay. There should be no difficulty so far. I will myself see M. de Saverne on your son's behalf. Should he not afford me the most ample apology—an apology as public as the insult which he offered—I shall take upon me to arrange a meeting at a time that will be fixed hereafter. I have no doubt that M. de Lussac will see his duty in the true light, or perhaps"—and I do not know why I was moved to say it—"Providence may step in and remove your difficulty. If you think right, you may tell M. de Lussac that I am acting on his behalf."

I could do nothing else; I should have done the same if he had been my own son, and his

honor had been mine. I knew what a hostile meeting with M. de Saverne meant, but he who plays at bowls must be prepared for the rubs, and there was now no other way in which the reputation of this young man could be preserved. To be stamped as a coward on his entrance into life meant a long career of insult and contempt from which there was no escape, and hardly a second chance of redemption.

Madame embraced my suggestion willingly; indeed, she would have yielded to any proposal which carried with it the prospect of delay, though I do not think she had even then any hope of an honorable conclusion. But she read my sympathy in my eyes—sympathy is easy towards a beautiful woman—and was quite content to leave the matter in my hands.

I lost no time. M. de Saverne received me in his house in the Marais with much well-concealed surprise, and more than his usual disdain. There were several gentlemen with him whom I did not know, but I purposely delivered my message in public. I saw from their manner that I had acted rightly in adopting this course, for it was plain they expected that M. de Lussac had now no intention of vindicating his reputation. So far as was consistent with my character as an ambassador, I endeavored to show M. de Saverne what I thought of himself, and the contempt with which

I personally regarded him, and I could see that he winced under my studied manner and unaffected disdain. I knew him, indeed, for a man of invincible courage, but I had the best of reasons for knowing him to be a liar, a trickster, and a cheat. Such men are frequently surrounded by a crowd of lads, who admire their courage as they admire the beauty of a woman, and altogether unmindful of the character and vices which it masks. Nor was this gentleman any exception to the rule, and I knew the admiration in which he was held rendered the task I had proposed to myself all the more difficult.

When I had delivered my message he regarded me with extreme ill-will, and, turning away contemptuously, spoke in a tone that nearly caused me to forget the moderation I determined to practise.

"M. de Lussac has chosen a curious friend."

"He could not have chosen one more willing, or one who knows you better. But I am not here to discuss myself or you. I have already expressed myself with sufficient force upon that head."

He blushed under his sallow skin, and twisted his mustache fiercely upward to conceal his confusion.

"Perhaps you would like to walk out with me yourself?"

"There is nothing in the world would give me greater pleasure," I answered; "but I am unable to gratify my inclinations until my principal is satisfied. I am then at your disposal. In the meantime, it is unfortunate that M. de Lussac cannot at once express his sense of the profound obligation under which he labors. Immediately the state of his health permits he begs that you will appoint the time and place, and he will not fail."

"He did not show much inclination when we were last together," he sneered.

"It will be time enough, sir," I said, firmly, "to disparage his courage when you have reckoned your account together. For myself, I do not fight with boys; neither do I play with them. Is there any gentleman here except yourself, with whom I cannot fight, who has anything to say regarding the courage of M. de Lussac?"

I think they did not like my looks, or had heard something of my skill—which is very probable—for they were all silent, or made a gesture of mute dissent, with which I was very well content. For the first time in my life I was unwilling to draw my sword. Madame's offer, which the desperateness of her fears had prompted, and which became her as little as it became myself, made me jealous of my own conduct, and scrupulous that I should not even in form approach the

dishonorable path into which she had invited me. But I was satisfied before I left that no one would dare to hint that M. de Lussac was afraid to uphold his own character, or was likely to shrink from the meeting which I had arranged. My own history was too well known to suppose for an instant that I would espouse the cause of a coward, and I managed to convey by several delicate hints that the delay which I proposed was due to my own prudence. Certainly M. de Lussac's character had not yet suffered, and no one suspected for a moment the astounding secret of which his mother had made me the incredulous depositary. It now remained in his own hands to decide the shape his future life should take. I could not for an instant suppose that he would stand hesitating upon the broad road of honor. The scruples which his mother misunderstood—the hesitation which she had imputed to cowardice—I did not doubt I should be able effectually to remove, for I now felt that my own reputation was involved.

It was, therefore, with good hope that I waited upon Madame de Lussac at her hôtel to report the result of my embassy. When she heard my news she received me with a transport of joy, and quite descended from the cold isolation of rank into an intimate and charming familiarity, which, indeed, seemed less natural, but was there-

fore the more alluring. Again and again she bade me repeat all that had been done and said, and I did not fail to relate the least circumstance, dwelling with emphasis on the point that no one suspected what had seemed to her so clear. She seized my hand and pressed it warmly in her own, and I could now see that, like myself, she hoped the affair would end prosperously and without loss of honor.

"Any words that I can use," she cried, "are too poor to give you thanks! You have, indeed, saved me—me, Madame de Lussac; for the disgrace was killing me. I could not again have looked the world in the face."

"Have you told M. de Lussac?" I asked.

"My son?—yes," she answered, with what seemed to me a gesture almost of contempt. "I think he has still enough of my blood in his veins to protect himself when he is placed with his back to the wall. I told him what I had done, and he expressed himself satisfied."

"What did he say?" I asked, for I could not think that so fine a gentleman would care for the intervention of a rough, unpolished soldier like myself.

"That I should have no reason to blush for his conduct. But you will see him yourself; you will stay and dine with me?"

I bowed, and madame rose and sounded the

gong. A servant appeared, and madame said, carelessly :

“François, tell M. de Lussac that I will see him here. M. Dillon is with me.”

Then she turned to me, and began to question me regarding myself and my history with that sympathetic interest which is so charming in a woman, and especially a beautiful woman. It is a species of flattery which at once attacks the mind and the heart—which at once disarms and attracts. But I own I was still a little fearful of madame. I knew not the moment that one chance word—the soldier’s customary phrase—the familiar echo of the camp—would raise her haughty brows, and harden her proud and beautiful lips. But I think I interested her, and especially in the story of the Brigadier, which I told plainly and with some feeling. Yet it struck me afterwards that when I paused in my narrative she seemed to be listening, not to me, but for a sound beyond the room and at a distance.

We had sat together a good while, and madame was beginning to show some little impatience openly, when the servant returned.

“M. de Lussac must have gone out, madame,” he said; “I cannot make him hear.”

I am not unobservant, even in the presence of a woman. Madame grew white—even her lips were

white—but she answered with the most perfect composure.

“Very well. You will tell him when he returns.”

Then she turned to me, but I saw that it was a mere dull farce that she was playing. She could not rest a moment; she could not meet my eyes; her imperious will was broken down by her anxiety and fear. I had almost ventured to suggest that she was unwell when she suddenly rose.

“You will pardon me,” she said. “I think I will find M. de Lussac myself.”

Almost before I could reply she was gone, and I sat down to await her return; but I do not know what feelings oppressed and chilled me—a vague sense of impending disaster—a premonition of evil that I could not account for or define. I felt as though we were on the threshold of a tragedy, though of what nature I could not tell.

In the meantime the house was perfectly still; only the steps of time were audible where a clock under a cloud of golden cupids struck the hour of four. I found myself sitting listening. Then suddenly I heard a long, shrill shriek, rising to a height of tragic despair, and stopping short with a suddenness that startled and oppressed me. It came once, and was not repeated.

I did not hesitate a moment, but ran to the door, and found myself in the corridor, where a

crowd of startled domestics were already running in bewilderment and fear. When I came down they were gathered round M. de Lussac's room, but not one of them had the courage to enter. I pushed my way among them, and stood for an instant horror-stricken on the threshold. But I stood only for an instant, and then ran rather than walked into the room. The tragedy was over.

On the floor not far from her son lay Madame de Lussac, a bundle of silk and laces, with a little streak of blood on her white lips and a sheet of paper clutched tightly in her jewelled hand. And still seated on his chair, with his head resting on his arms, was M. de Lussac. He had been writing, for the pen with the ink hardly dry on it lay near him. The empty phial told the rest. I lifted his head for a single moment, and then I turned towards madame, who hardly seemed to breathe. De Lussac had passed to another court than the court of honor. His good fame and that of his illustrious house was safe—he was dead.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

3.

Part VI

THE KNEES OF FATE



PART VI

THE KNEES OF FATE

I.—A BROKEN GENTLEMAN

I LOOK back on this period with equanimity and even with pride, just as the retired veteran contemplates his honorable scars. I have no intention of dwelling upon what I suffered, or describing the thousand shifts I employed to keep body and soul together. But I admit I was reduced to absolute want, and often passed the entire day without a meal. This is not in itself a trifling matter, as he must avouch who has tried it, but it was hardly the worst. I was absolutely alone; I had no friends and no employment; I was almost without the hope of obtaining either the one or the other. This was, perhaps, to some extent due to my own pride, but I could not help it. While there still remained any hope of being restored to my regiment I had not refused the generous services of my friends, and had used their purse as my own with a soldier's careless

freedom. But after that door of hope was closed, and there seemed no likelihood of my ever being able to repay what I had borrowed, I felt myself no longer at liberty to exercise this familiarity. Till then I had not felt ashamed of my poverty ; it was only a part of my unmerited misfortune, and no blot or stain on the escutcheon of a gentleman. But hunger and hopelessness turn the fine edge of a man's temper, and slacken the swiftness of his courage. He loses his mastery over his own resources, and, humbled in his pride, has less power to act and plan. His heart is taken out of him, and while some even lose their virtue and turn to roguery that they may exist at all, others die with their faces to the wall and a sort of despairing courage still in their breasts. I admit that I might have done the latter but for a certain splendid obstinacy of character and fine disdain of circumstance ; the former I could never do, nor have done.

You may picture my condition. I lived in the garret of a great house tenanted by thieves and beggars, and was now hardly to be distinguished outwardly from them, for my wardrobe had gone, article by article, to satisfy the claims of hunger. I had not a friend to whom I could speak a word, and had grown ashamed of appearing in the streets during the day—a friendless night-bird who slept in an attic and starved with a show of

patience. It is not likely you know the Rue Vitry, where the beast of prey naturally finds a home, and the unfortunate seek a place of concealment or a lair in which to make an end. It was my last halting-place on my downward career, and for nearly four months I endured its misery and witnessed its wretchedness. All that was left to me of the past was my honorable career, my pride, and my sword, with which I was determined never to part. I had sat in that squalid attic day after day, counting the hours and waiting for the night, when I might begin my aimless wandering in the deserted streets without fear of recognition. That fear had become almost a passion. I could not now endure to meet any of my old friends in my threadbare suit and broken shoes, even though I knew I was certain of sympathy and eleemosynary help. I had hitherto faced the world with the courage of a soldier and the spirit of a man of birth and honor on equal footing with the best, but now the weight of my misfortunes had left me only the resolution to suffer patiently and endure without a murmur. There is no romance in poverty; there is no poetry in the ineffectual search after an illusive meal; nay, a man can scarce respect himself who sees his poverty in his elbows and his calamities gaping through the seams of his shoes. I had almost arrived at this stage.

I knew that many of my old comrades had endeavored to trace me out, and I have since heard they had arranged a scheme by which I was certain of employment in the service of the empress, where so many of my gallant countrymen have honorable service. But though at first I might have accepted their help, I could not now bear to think that any of my former friends should witness the miserable condition to which I was reduced, and at this time I do not think any of them had any idea that I was in hiding in Paris. There certainly never was any more miserable figure than mine at this period. I had grown gaunt and haggard almost beyond recognition; my dress, in which I had formerly taken some pride, was stained and ragged, and showing in more places than one where I had unskilfully tried to mend it. The little cracked looking-glass in my attic reflected the despair and misery that I felt in my heart, and showed me a man who, at the age of thirty-eight years, seemed broken by fortune and hopeless of better days. Yet I do not think that I was absolutely without hope. Had that been the case I should at once have resigned myself to fate, and yielded without further struggle. It may seem a strange thing, but the sight of my sword hanging by my wretched bed, and the memories that it carried with it like a far-off perfume, was a continual spur and stimulus, and bound me to a

past that I could not forget or dishonor. I was still Anthony Dillon, late of Fortgale, in the Kingdom of Ireland, gentleman.

This was my condition on the last night—the 31st of December—of that most memorable year. I think I was in a state of mind even more despondent than I had been in for some time, for my riotous neighbors were holding their festivities on every side of me, and the darkness was filled with the burden of oaths and drunken songs. Even the blind fiddler on the other side of the passage, whose little girl was my only friend, was making merry in his own way, and I could hear his coarse, broken voice joining in a bacchanalian chorus with three or four of his cronies as disreputable and tipsy as himself.

I had intended spending the evening alone in my chamber, and had bought a candle below stairs for the purpose—a luxury to which I had not once treated myself for six weeks, as I could think very well in the dark. The noise, however, was so intolerable, and my disgust so great, that I determined to go out into the air, and spend the remainder of the evening till midnight in the streets. Accordingly, after I had finished my supper of bread and onions, I buckled on my sword and threw my old campaigning-cloak about my shoulders. It had been snowing earlier in the day, but that had ceased, and it was now very

cold, with a bright flush of stars and a little moon. I locked my door behind me, though I smiled bitterly at my needless precaution, and, seaching in the darkness for the balustrade, felt my way down the creaking staircase. It was now about half-past eight o'clock. When I reached the street door I stood for a little while on the steps looking out upon the silver whiteness, and thankful to escape the din and uproar that I had left behind me on every floor as I descended. For here everything was quite silent, and I could see no one abroad. I turned to the right hand towards the Rue des Ours—I generally walked the other way—and I had hardly gone more than half a dozen paces when I saw the cloaked figure of a woman huddled in the next doorway. The dull light of a flickering, smoky lamp fell upon her, but her face was entirely concealed, and the shadows so uncertain that I could distinguish nothing but her outlines. As I passed it struck me that she was anxious to escape observation, for she crept close to the angle of the wall as I passed, and drew her cloak hurriedly about her face. Such sights were not unusual in the Rue Vitry—that refuge of vice and misfortune—and I passed the woman without further notice or consideration. Then I stopped short, and hung upon my footsteps with a sudden thought. I think it was fate. I do not know why I should have done this of my

own notion. But it struck me that there was something in the woman that was by no means in keeping with her surroundings—that here was no common Magdalene, but one who sought rather a place of assignation than a place of shelter. And then I smiled to think of a lady in the Rue Vitry—a curious place of meeting. Yet this suspicion grew upon me almost to a certainty, for there was another circumstance which immediately occurred to my mind. The house where she had concealed herself had been for a long time untenanted, and though the windows were heavily barred and the door secured by an enormous padlock, it had fallen into a state of ruin which no attempt had been made to repair. However, two or three times lately, on returning from my nocturnal wanderings, I had seen the door ajar and a light in one of the upper windows. More than that, upon one occasion I had seen two gentlemen leaving the house, and though they had crossed the street to avoid me, I felt certain, dark as it was, that one was old and one young, and both persons of condition. I think there is no doubt that this circumstance, and the mystery surrounding it, first attracted my particular notice to the woman, and then aroused my suspicions. But, however that may be, I walked slowly down to the end of the street, glancing occasionally over my shoulder at the still, motionless figure,

and then halted at the corner, actuated merely by a sense of curiosity. At another time I am certain I should have done nothing of the sort, for this course was quite out of keeping with my usual conduct; but now I obeyed a natural instinct.

I had withdrawn into the shadow, and from where I stood I could see the little patch of brown light on the white snow and the darkness where the woman stood behind. I am sure nearly ten minutes passed, and yet there was no change. My patience was growing exhausted, for, as I have said, I was actuated merely by curiosity, and I was about to resume my ramble when something occurred which quickened my interest. In the still, frosty air I heard the sound of singing and laughter, and soon saw four or five fellows passing down the other side of the street. I watched them till they came opposite to where the woman was, and here they halted. I knew that this was merely a chance *rencontre*, and did not anticipate any disturbance; but, almost without thinking, I began to retrace my steps slowly, still keeping well in the shadow. For a while I heard nothing; then suddenly there came a loud laugh, followed by a shrill scream twice repeated, which was then immediately hushed. You can understand that I did not hesitate. I instantly ran across the road through the snow that had drifted here two or

three feet deep, and almost as quickly as I have taken to tell the story I was in the midst of the group. The woman, with her white face exposed and her eyes wide open in terror, lay upon the ground, and one of the ruffians knelt with his knee upon her breast. He had dragged off her mantle, for it lay in a heap near her, and had torn open the bosom of her dress in his search, as I imagined, after her purse. They were all so much taken up with their prize that they never noticed me till I was among them. I never waited to draw my sword, but hurled first one and then another into the kennel; then I caught the kneeling man by the shoulder and spurned him with my foot. The woman had still her senses, for once she was free she rose immediately from the ground, and seemed about to seek safety in flight. But I placed her behind me, and turned to face her assailants, who had gathered themselves up, and stood sullenly meditating their chance of success in this altered state of affairs. They were all armed and not without some courage, but they paused at the sight of my determined countenance and the sword that I now held naked in my hand.

It is hard to tell how it would have gone; they were five, and I alone, and burdened by a woman; but I had the advantage of position, sheltered as I was by the projecting doorway. That was worth

at least two swords, had I not had perfect confidence in my own. My blood was up, and I was now almost in hope that they would not resign their prey without a struggle. In this, however, I was disappointed. They had drawn together, and were preparing for a rush, when the woman suddenly uttered a loud cry of relief and darted from behind me. I knew in an instant that assistance in some shape had arrived, and so did my opponents. We all looked hastily in the one direction and saw two men running towards us with their swords drawn; and I knew at once that the danger was over. The fellows about me did not wait a second, but set off in the opposite direction, leaving their comrade, whom I had struck, still groaning in the footway. I knelt down a moment to examine him, and saw that he was only stunned by the blow, for he was already able to sit up, though hardly yet alive to what had befallen him. I rose up and sheathed my rapier, waiting patiently for what might happen, for a nearer view of the woman had convinced me that something unusual had occurred. .

The two men had halted within a dozen paces of me, and were talking in low and excited whispers with their female companion. Like her, they seemed anxious that their faces should not be discovered, and I instinctively guessed they were debating whether it would not be best to leave

me without a word of thanks. Then one of them—the taller and slighter of the two—turned upon his heel, and, coming forward to where I was still standing, lifted the woman's mantle from the ground before he said a word. I could not see his face, but I saw that he was observing me narrowly. Notwithstanding his disguise, I could have sworn he was a gentleman.

"We are obliged to you," he said, in a voice that I knew was not natural; "you have done us a service."

"I hope the—the lady is none the worse," I answered. "It was a near thing: it was as well I was at hand. The Rue Vitry is not a nice place."

"It is a very charming neighborhood," he answered, with a shrug and a touch of irony, "but it was an accident."

"An accident I should advise you not to permit to occur twice," I answered, meaningly. "I hope it will prove a warning."

"In what way?"

I thought he betrayed some alarm, as though there was more meaning in my language than the words conveyed.

"In this way, monsieur: he needs both feet and hands who would walk here safely after night, and in any case it is no place for a woman."

"Ah! You yourself are—"

"I am—nothing."

"You have a name?"

"Not even that."

"Poor, I think?"

"That is my own business. I do not ask for charity."

"Heaven forbid! We owe you something. Drink and forget."

He came a step nearer to me, and before I knew what he was about he thrust five louis into my hand. It was done so quickly that I held the coins in my outstretched palm with my eyes fixed on the dull lustre of the gold, for the lamp shone right above me. Then suddenly remembering myself, but forgetting my destitute condition, I flung them at his feet with a fierce exclamation.

"I am no cutthroat or spadassin, monsieur!" I cried. "I do not help a woman in distress for hire. Though I do not know your business here, my fine gentleman, you may still find honor in Rue Vitry."

With that I turned away from him and strode doggedly into the darkness.

It was some time before I came to look at the matter sensibly. At first I tingled at what I considered the insult that had been offered to me, forgetting that the man probably only desired to do me a kindness and knew nothing regarding me. That I had at first indignantly rejected the gift was a natural and spontaneous act; it was the

result of my traditions and training as a gentleman. But as I cooled, and more pressing considerations presented themselves, I asked myself why I might not honorably have accepted a gift so spontaneously offered. It was in the nature of a reward for honorable services which I had not sought or demanded; and I had, indeed, earned the money as a soldier earns his pay, though the campaign was only an evening brawl and the battle-field a causeway in Paris. I had not drawn my sword for hire. This was, after all, the mere expression of gratitude, in which there was nothing dishonorable. And yet I still hesitated, and continued to hesitate, as I walked rapidly, with my head in the air and my cloak drawn about my face. But I needed the money; there was no man in the whole city who needed it more than myself. It was mere madness to permit unreasoning pride to stand in the way of my necessity. Knowing the motives that prompted me, I could still respect myself and accept the wages I had earned; and for others—in the name of Heaven, what had I to do with others? an unknown, forgotten soldier, starving in a garret!

Imperceptibly I slackened my footsteps as I turned over the matter in my mind, and then I stopped short. There was no doubt I had been a fool, and an ungrateful fool; but I might not yet be too late. It was probable the money still lay

where I had thrown it. No one had seen my action, and the man who had offered me the pieces with so cavalier and disdainful an air had probably thought no more about them. But to me they were a fortune. All at once I grew as eager to recover them as I had been formerly to reject them, and, turning my face homeward—or towards the squalid attic I called home—I made my way rapidly back to the Rue Vitry. Here I found everything dark and silent; there was not a living soul in the street but myself. In a minute or two I was under the shadow of the doorway and upon my hands and knees searching among the trampled snow. There was a thin trickle of blood showing red under the dim lamp, but the wounded man had either been carried or had crawled away. I had little difficulty in finding four of the pieces, but the fifth was nowhere to be found. I searched with as much eagerness as if I had never had any doubt or hesitation regarding the propriety of accepting them; but my endeavors were without success.

Convinced that it was useless to continue, I had risen from my knees, and was about to return to my garret, when my eyes fell upon a packet of paper that lay close to the wall, and was hardly to be distinguished in the whiteness of the drifted snow. Thinking that it had probably been dropped in the recent brawl, but attaching no

further importance to it, I thrust it into my breast and returned to the house where I lodged.

When I had entered my own room and locked the door I searched for the tinder, and, lighting my candle, sat down to enjoy the spectacle of my treasure. I spread the coins out before me, and no one but perhaps the man who has plumbed the same depths of poverty can understand the delight with which the sight filled me. My scruples had disappeared; my empty pride had vanished. Here was food and warmth and wine for some weeks, and the rushlight of hope grew and brightened till the future caught the rosy glow and I felt myself a man again, or, rather—for I must not wrong myself—I felt myself twice the man I had been.

I do not know how long I sat following the airy visions that the sight of the gold had awakened into life, but when I came back to the solid earth again my candle had nearly burned out, and was blinking and sputtering to extinction. I rose hurriedly, and, divesting myself of my coat, threw it upon the chair from which I had risen. As I did so the packet I had picked up—the existence of which I had altogether forgotten—fell with a rustle to my feet. I lifted it and sat down to examine the envelope with the little light that was still left me. There was no inscription upon it, but it had been sealed with a coat of arms of which I could make nothing, for the wax had

been broken in such a way that I could not decipher any portion of it. Upon the outside there was no clew to the ownership. I hesitated a moment, and then opened the letter, which was apparently closely written and of considerable length, from its broken cover. I admit my first thought was to make myself master of its contents. But I put the temptation aside for the moment, and, turning over the paper, looked for the signature at the end. I had hardly done that than the next moment I rose to my feet in astonishment and dismay, for the name that met my eyes was that of the proudest and most powerful woman in France—Madame de Pompadour. The sight almost took away my breath; it opened up a whole world of speculation, and brought me face to face with a mystery that appeared insoluble. Question after question rose to my lips and trembled on my tongue. Who were the gentlemen who had made this ruined house a place of assignation, and with such evident desire to preserve their incognito? Why of all places in the world had they selected the Rue Vitry, that last refuge of dicers, stabbers, and thieves; and, above all, how had a private letter of the king's mistress—nay, the mistress of France, the directress of her councils and the arbiter of her destinies—made its way hither, and for what purpose? And how—by what whim of chance, by what sport of fate—had it found its way into

the hands of a broken soldier, forsaken by the world and deserted by fortune?

The paper shook in my trembling hands. I sat down again at the table and spread out the pages before me, but such was my agitation that for the moment I could see nothing. And then—on so small an accident, on so trivial a chance, our future frequently depends—the candle, that had already warned me of its failing condition, went out with a sudden flicker and left me in absolute darkness. There was now nothing for it but to wait till dawn, and stifle my curiosity till the gray light of the winter morning made clear the doubts that perplexed and harassed. And yet, so strangely are we fashioned, at that moment I would have given a year of my life for five minutes of the feeble light that had gone out. But that was out of the question. There was only one thing that I could now do, and, taking up the paper, I thrust it under my pillow and threw myself upon my bed, at the same time taking the precaution that my sword should be near my hand.

At first I did not doubt that I had unwittingly stumbled upon some secret of state, but of what nature I could not guess. And yet if the greatest woman in France had correspondents in the Rue Vitry, she took a curious way to deliver her letters, and observed few precautions in the event of discovery. The envelope had been impressed

with her arms—of that I had now no doubt; her signature was legible, in her bold and capable handwriting, and such a chance as had now occurred might give her secret to all the world. Then as I lay musing and wondering, in my vague guesses I stumbled upon the truth, and in a moment became convinced in my own mind that I was right. But even before I had arrived at that stage I had mastered one temptation and become fully resolved on one point. Whatever the contents of this letter might be, and I did not doubt its importance, the secret was none of my business; and as a gentleman I could not read what had never been intended for my eyes. That was clear—that was imperative; and whatever the consequences might be I should not again permit my eyes to rest upon a word, but keep the high-road of honor as a soldier and a gentleman. I was still Anthony Dillon.

But, as I have said, I was convinced I had now stumbled upon the truth, and in that conviction I saw some hope for myself, and in this lucky chance a strange beginning of a new career. Perhaps no man is altogether blind to his own interests, and I admit the advancement of my own fortunes occupied some part of my mind; but I trust I would still have taken the same course and played the same game had my own inevitable ruin been the consequence and the result.

The more I thought upon the matter the stronger grew the certainty in my mind. The letter that lay under my pillow had never been intended for the Rue Vitry. The enemies of madame, and I knew she was surrounded by enemies, as she was surrounded by spies, had found the means to tamper with her servants and betray her by private correspondence. This letter was the first-fruit of the conspiracy, and in my disgrace and exile I had unconsciously walked within its circle. It was clear now—the secrecy, the disguise, the haste, the evident perturbation and fear of discovery.

I was never wanting in that quality of mind which my friends call resolution and my enemies audacity, and I made up my mind almost in a moment. If I was right in my conjecture, I should win the thanks and gratitude of one who might prove a powerful friend; if I was wrong, and had blundered blindly where I had no concern, I had little more to lose, and had only accelerated the ruin that had overtaken me. In any case, I was doing what I saw was clearly my duty, and fulfilling an obligation my conscience and my code had laid upon myself. Whatever the result might be, I should place madame's letter in the writer's hands, and, if that was possible by any means, in person. I should employ no intermediary; I should make no confidant;

she should hear the whole story from my own lips and from mine alone, and if truth and courage availed a man in desperate straits, I hoped I might still have a fling with fortune.

I knew there were great and serious difficulties in my path, and that an unknown and friendless soldier would find it hard to push his way into the presence of the first favorite; but at the same time I felt if there was anything in my secret a whisper would prove an open sesame, and the very means I had adopted would add another claim upon her gratitude. To do otherwise would be to lose half the game, and perhaps cause me to be shouldered once more into neglect and obscurity—a thing I was determined should not happen.

The reverse side of the picture did not trouble me. It was possible, in my ignorance of state affairs and the thousand tricks of faction and of party, I might blunder badly, and find my palace of hope in the grim reality of the Bastille for meddling where I had no business. I had known such things to happen, but I felt my ill-luck had gone out with the old year, and that new and brighter fortunes were dawning upon me with the new day.

Then I fell asleep, and I slept without any of the hideous and ghastly dreams that had troubled me for some weeks.

II.—THE ARMY OF M. DE MONTMESNIL

My resolution did not alter on the following morning. There was a fine, clear frost, with sunshine in the air, and my spirits were lighter and my hopes higher than I had known them for a very long time. I felt that I had grown younger under the immediate prospect of a turn with fortune, for you can understand that I had no intention to waste time in idle and dangerous delay. During the night I had measured every step, weighed every movement, and almost chosen every word. It now only remained to carry out my premeditated arrangements, and see that I exercised prudence and caution as well as courage. I did not now doubt that every event of the last night had fallen out for my special advantage, and under the influence of my benignant star. In my forlorn and wholly destitute condition I should have found it hard, perhaps impossible, to have made such an appearance as would secure me an entrance to the palace. But now, with the little fortune at my command, I had almost the means to equip myself as a gentleman, or at least to repair the outward marks of neglect

and poverty. That, I determined, should be my first care, or among the first, and I do not now doubt its wisdom. The world despises courage in rags and virtue in poverty till time has removed both from a speaking acquaintance.

So certain was I that I should not again return to the Rue Vitry, that I crossed the passage to bid farewell to my friend, the little seamstress, an old-fashioned child, whose artless speech and ways had lightened for me the burden of many weary hours; and I am afraid the trifling souvenir I laid in her hand at parting was of greater value than was justified by my slender means. But I felt that I owed her a debt greater than I could pay, and I am happy to think it was afterwards discharged.

But, in the meantime, I went gayly down the staircase that I had so often climbed with an aching heart, and first paid a visit to a little barber whom I used to patronize in my more fortunate days. My appearance was so much altered that he did not at first recognize me at all, and, indeed, appeared averse to receive a customer apparently so disreputable; but as he drew near the close of his operations I saw a look of puzzled recognition stealing over his face, and finally he stumbled on my name. As I watched the progress of the nimble workman in the mirror before me, I saw the Rue Vitry and its attendant wretchedness

slowly disappearing, and my former countenance, a little graver and older perhaps, looking out upon me with something of its old courage and cheerfulness. I had a strange feeling regarding it—it was like the face of a familiar comrade whom I had met for the first time after years of separation—a feeling that I was back among my friends. The barber, who had an insidious curiosity like all his caste, had many stories to tell me regarding my old acquaintances, but I was eager to finish what I had in hand, and left the shop almost before his budget had been well opened.

I like to dwell upon the incidents of this eventful day, but it is a strange thing that there is none I remember more clearly and distinctly than the breakfast I made after my toilet was completed. I still remember the fragrance of the omelet; I can still recall the flavor of the wine; I can recognize the faces in the café, and the astonished servant who waited upon me.

I had resolved to begin my new life with a royal meal, and I can still see my disreputable figure before the well-spread table, and the clear space between myself and the trim, disdainful guests. But the astonishment of the on-lookers did not interfere in the least degree with my appetite and enjoyment, and I returned the stare with which I was met by one as cold and fiercely contemptuous. In the end I flung down a louis

in payment, and, lifting my change, strode out of the café with a feeling that I was as good a man as any in Paris, and at that moment a dangerous one to cross with impunity. I do not take any pride in this feeling or credit for this mood. But it was natural, and perhaps the generous wine was in my head. In the end I found that I had drawn with too lavish and prodigal a hand upon my wealth, for when I came to replace my threadbare clothes, about which I set immediately, I discovered that I must content myself with what was merely necessary. I own I exercised all my powers of persuasion to obtain upon credit those articles for which I could not pay, and very nearly succeeded; but I am convinced the tailor did not like my looks, and finally refused his confidence with many expressions of sincere regret. I was, however, very well satisfied upon the whole, and though my pockets were now quite as empty as they were the day before, I felt certain I presented a creditable appearance, and no longer felt any shame regarding my dress. The want of money did not trouble me—habit had made its absence easy—but I felt sure I had wealth in my secret and preferment in the pocket of my vest.

I must now see that I made no false step. I had learned that Madame de Pompadour had been in Paris the day before, and was now at Versailles, where the New-Year's festivities were being con-

ducted with great magnificence and splendor. I was very well aware of the difficulties which I should meet in obtaining an interview, but with my native courage and hopefulness I felt there was no obstacle that I could not surmount; and I set out in high spirits, and with a feeling of elation. I have now more knowledge of courts and perhaps less confidence in my own audacity, but I went about my business in the right mind and manner, and this was my fortunate day. Had I hesitated, or had I had less confidence in myself, I should have completely failed, and this history would never have been written. But there are times when fortune turns every trifle to our advantage, and it is then, when the tide of luck is running, that we should play our cards and back our game. It was now so with me.

By a very good chance I met an old friend, a gentleman of the Gardes de Roi, who had supped with me three or four times after Fontenoy, and he received me like one risen from the dead, and astonished at my appearance.

"The ghosts are walking to-day," he said. "You are the second. M. de Montmesnil was the other."

"M. de Montmesnil?" I said, considering, for the name was as familiar as a half-recalled memory.

"You do not remember him, then—there are

some who do. The ghost of a crime—one of Saverne's friends."

"I have not heard the story, but I remember the name now."

"It is a curious tale. They say Saverne was poisoned, and Montmesnil had a hand in his removal. At any rate, he disappeared in consequence, and I have not seen him for nearly two years till this morning—as much changed as yourself. He is a dangerous man to remain at large. Come and let me hear your story over a flask of wine. I remember Saverne was the cause of your trouble."

We adjourned to a tavern much frequented by the gentlemen of the guard, and here seated at a little table I told my friend as much of my story as I thought advisable, and then I suddenly broached the subject that was uppermost in my mind. He looked at me as though I had taken leave of my senses, and then burst into a fit of unrestrained, uproarious laughter.

"*Ma foi!*" he cried, when he had somewhat sobered, "you become ambitious; the grub has grown a full-winged butterfly. Will nothing content you but a private interview with the Pompadour?"

"For Heaven's sake, be silent!" I cried, looking round, for there were some gentlemen in the room whose attention we had already attracted. "You

do not understand. I have by the most fortunate chance learned a matter which is of interest to Madame de Pompadour, and is not in any way connected with myself. I do not say that I have no chance of profiting by it—I hope I may—but I am certain I shall be welcome, and at the same time render her a service.”

“Body of Christ! you are as mysterious as a Jesuit. But you cannot play tricks with Antoinette—she flashes like a thunderbolt.”

“The mouse helped the lion,” I said, with a smile; “I am certain of my ground. You think I have taken leave of my senses—very well. But you will help me?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“I might do that, and I have no doubt that Liancourt, who hates me like the devil, will be glad to step into my shoes.”

“I do not feel at liberty,” I said, “to be more explicit, for the secret is not my own. Were it otherwise you should know all. But I speak plainly and with an open mind when I say that I believe Madame de Pompadour will not refuse to see me—nay, more, that there is no man in France at this moment she would see more willingly.”

“H’m! The Irish are an imaginative people.”

“I do not know, M. Saint-Ybar, whether you intend that remark as an insult.”

“Soul of the Pope! I would not hurt your

feelings for the Mazarin jewels!" he cried, laughing. "I do not doubt you believe every word you say, but three feet do not always make a yard."

"In what way, monsieur?"

"They measure more when you leave the Pompadour in disgrace."

"I shall not do that."

"At least, you are not wanting in confidence."

"I have no doubt in my own mind. I am sorry you will not help me."

"Oh! I did not say that. I can bring you near the fire; but you must find some one else to pull out your chestnuts. By-the-way," he continued, without any change of manner, "you do not object to changing our seat—there is a draught from the window, and I am susceptible to cold. Ah! this is better," he went on, making his way to the farther end of the room and sitting down in a dimly lighted corner. "Now let us talk of—anything."

"I do not understand."

"And upon my faith neither do I; but I wish to understand if possible."

"What do you not understand?"

"The interest you seem to have awakened in two or three unwholesome-looking gentlemen who have been observing you for some time—first one, then another, and finally a third. I saw them pass the window oftener than seemed neces-

sary, and they appeared to have eyes only for yourself. It may be merely accident."

"Or a portion of the drama in which I am playing a part. I do not know. Yet I think not."

"If so, it seems likely there is danger in the air. And what part does madame play?"

"I hope to be able to answer that later. In the meantime—"

"In the meantime you can now see the gentlemen for yourself. Pah! those rogues were born for the gallows."

As he spoke three men entered the tavern, and with an affected noisy hilarity took a seat near us. They called for something to drink, but all the while I thought they were far more interested in myself than in one another or in the wine they had ordered. In all of them there was the same sidelong, furtive observation, which instantly ceased the moment I turned my eyes in their direction; and after a little while I had no doubt that I was the sole object of their attention and the one point of their curiosity. They were certainly ugly and forbidding-looking fellows, whose natural element was theft and violence; but I was not in the slightest degree afraid, and did not care a pinch of snuff for the trio. But it was clear that I was actually being watched, and it was now fairly upon the cards that an attempt

would be made to deprive me of the letter before I had placed it in the writer's hands. Yet I own I was rather pleased than otherwise. Nothing could have shown me more clearly the importance which was attached to my secret, but it was also a clear warning that I should lose no time in carrying out my design.

We sat for some time, after which Saint-Ybar rose and arranged his cloak in his usual foppish and languid manner. Then he crossed the room and surveyed himself with satisfaction in the mirror, twisting his mustache, and setting his hat jauntily upon one side of his head. While he did this I could see with a sidelong glance the fellows holding a consultation among themselves, and, as I imagined, considering their chances of success in the event of their now attacking me. There was now no one in the room but Saint-Ybar and myself, and I think they were upon the point of trying conclusions then and there, when the door opened and a new-comer entered. There seemed to me to be something familiar in his figure; I felt that I had seen him before, but I could not tell when or where. My back was turned towards him; Saint-Ybar was still regarding himself in the looking-glass. The last arrival sat down at a table by himself and carelessly stretched out his legs. The murmur of conversation behind me suddenly ceased. Then M. Saint-

Ybar, with a sudden movement, though without turning round, and still apparently regarding himself in the glass, loosened his cloak and threw it over his left arm. After that he sauntered carelessly over to where I sat.

"It is time you returned to Paris," he said, in a loud tone. "There is not time for another bottle."

"I am at your service," I answered, rising to my feet.

The three men were watching me as a cat watches a mouse.

As M. Saint-Ybar passed him on his way out, the gentleman who had last come in raised his hat.

"M. Saint-Ybar, I think?"

"Did you address me, monsieur?"

"M. Saint-Ybar?"

"That is my name."

"Monsieur seems to have forgotten his old friends."

"You have the advantage of me. I do not remember you."

"That is—a figure of speech, monsieur."

"You are right. I do not wish to remember you. Now, M. Dillon."

With that he opened the door, and we passed out into the street. He placed his arm inside my own, and while I forbore to ask for an expla-

nation, he did not say anything until we had walked some distance. Then he suddenly broke out :

"You owe me a good deal, my friend."

"What do I owe you?"

"Your life, if it is worth anything. Another moment and the ruffian had stabbed you in the back. You owe your safety to my pardonable pride in my personal appearance."

"I saw nothing."

"I am certain you did not. If you intend to pursue your trade in secrets you cannot afford to turn a cold shoulder upon M. de Montmesnil's desperadoes."

"Then that was—"

"M. de Saverne's old friend—no other; and those were his sword-blades in tarnished scabbards. I saw the comedy in Antoine's looking-glass. M. de Montmesnil comes swaggering in and sits down, as you saw; but I noticed a look of recognition between himself and his followers which was something more than the mere freemasonry of villany. They waited patiently for his order, but at first he was afraid to set his creatures in motion. After a while he made a sign with his fingers, and it was at that moment I thought I could fight better without my cloak. The fellow thrust his weapon back as I turned round, for his rogue's heart failed him. Pardieu !

it was a near chance. And the broken bully had the insolence to address me! Is it possible—”

Saint-Ybar stopped, and then looked at me.

“That Montmesnil is at one end of the skein and the Pompadour at the other?”

“I begin to think it is very possible.”

I have said that I thought there was something familiar in M. de Montmesnil's figure, and it now flashed upon me that he was one and the same person whom I had seen last night in the Rue Vitry. Of course I could not be certain, as I had not then seen the man's face the evening before; but, in any case, he could have no other object in attacking me as he had done, and following me with so much persistence, for it was now clear he must have watched me the whole morning.

“I am Pompadour's friend,” Saint-Ybar said, airily. “I admire courage in a woman, and worship beauty like a pagan—she has both. You are sure you are not dreaming?”

“M. Montmesnil and his friends are a substantial dream.”

“Splendor of heaven! that is true. I will do something for you.”

“I knew that I could rely on your kindness.”

“Oh, this is no great matter. I shall hand you over to M. de Marigny.”

“Madame's brother? I ask for nothing better.”

“You will find him singularly devoid of imag-

ination, and very curious regarding the facts ; but I presume you will be able to satisfy him. For my own part, I cannot spare the time to visit the Bastille at present, and you had better keep me out of your history. I prefer good wine to politics, and my mistress to state secrets."

We found M. de Marigny very opportunely returning from a walk with two or three gentlemen, and Saint-Ybar drew him aside, and introduced me, as I have since thought, with very little ceremony.

"This is M. Dillon, a gentleman I formerly knew in Flanders, who informs me he has some communication for your private ear. I cannot answer for its importance, since I do not know its nature. I can only say that M. Dillon has been unfortunate ; but when I knew him formerly he bore a high character as a soldier and a gentleman, and I think he has not changed. With your permission, I will now leave you together."

I have since thought that M. Saint-Ybar had no other object than to do me a kindness without injury to himself, but this introduction was so abrupt and curious that M. de Marigny at first regarded me with some suspicion, and seemed disinclined to listen to me. But it was a fortunate thing for myself that there was probably no other person who had madame's interests so much at

heart, and in a very few minutes he was listening to me with attention and eagerness.

He had drawn me to one side within the recess of a secluded porch, and here he subjected me, as I could see, to a close and rigorous scrutiny.

"Now," he said, at length, "let me hear what you have to say to me."

"I have nothing to say to you, monsieur."

"Then we waste time. I will wish you good-morning."

"But I have something to say to Madame de Pompadour."

He looked at me keenly for a moment, and then smiled broadly, as if he found amusement in my words.

"I fear you will find that more difficult than you imagine. Madame does not see strangers."

"But with your help, monsieur?"

"Even with my help. You do not understand the situation, M. Dillon."

"Not even when the matter involves her safety and her honor?" I spoke slowly, and with a self-respecting firmness.

"How, monsieur?" he cried, menacingly. "Is there a threat in your words?"

"It is not half an hour," I went on, "since I was in danger of my life, and even now I have reason to believe my footsteps are dogged and my movements watched. It is not the enemies

of Anthony Dillon who are seeking his life; it is not in his own quarrel that they pursue him with determined hostility even to assassination. It is upon the secret of Madame de Pompadour they are travelling so fast."

"I do not understand you, monsieur."

He spoke with measured coldness, and still looked as though he thought I was seeking to draw him into a trap; but at the same time I felt that I had aroused his curiosity.

"I do not know," I said, "whether you are fully in the confidence of Madame de Pompadour."

"I have the honor to be her brother."

"It was for that reason I felt justified in seeking this interview. You will pardon me if even with you I cannot use entire freedom, but there are some matters—"

"I should prefer that you came to the point at once."

"I have arrived there, monsieur," I answered, flushing, for I was always quick as a blood-horse at the spur of contempt. "There was a letter written by madame."

With one glance at his face I knew that I was right, and that my secret was of tremendous value and importance. He was unable to disguise his eagerness. There was a sudden change in his manner from the insolence of superiority and

cold disdain of suspicion to the level of familiarity and conciliation, which marks the man lately arrived at fortune. He glanced round to make sure that we were not overheard, and spoke in a raised whisper.

"The stolen letters! You have news of them?"

"I think I am able to place my hand upon one letter written by Madame de Pompadour."

"One!" he said, with evident disappointment. "And the price?"

"There is no price. Had monsieur had the honor of my friendship I should have regarded the question as an insult. It is merely because madame is a lady that I seek to do my duty as a gentleman."

"May I inquire," he said, again reverting to his suspicious mood, "in what manner this letter came into your hands? I do not disguise the importance of the affair, but I must see that there are now no further complications."

"I find no fault with your anxiety, M. de Margny; it is merely natural. But I have not said that the letter was now in my custody—merely that I can lay my hands upon it. I may say, further, I do not know to whom the letter is written nor one word of its contents; that is not my business. But of this you may be certain: no one will be wiser than myself until the letter finds itself in the hands of Madame de Pompadour."

"Is it necessary that we should trouble her? I am entirely in her confidence."

"I now learn certainly for the first time that this letter was stolen; I had already suspected so much. By the merest accident of good-fortune—by the strangest turn of chance—I was able to place the letter beyond the reach of those who would have profited by it or injured the writer. I do not doubt you enjoy the fullest confidence of madame; I have the most absolute and implicit faith in every word you say, but you must pardon me. I see my duty clearly; I saw it the moment the chance presented itself. I made up my mind to deliver this letter to no other person than the writer."

"You will gain nothing by this course," he said, with evident irritation.

"You have already used that word, M. de Marigny, and still harp upon it. But you do not know me. I have only one mistress, whom I have still followed like a lover and served like a martyr, and her name is Honor. It is true that I am poor, but what then? I have been poor all my life, but I would not sell a lady's secret or trade upon the villany of others. I am here to do Madame de Pompadour a simple service. It is for you, knowing what you know, to say whether I shall be successful."

"Is it Don Quixote, or—"

"No, monsieur, it is Anthony Dillon, a broken Irish gentleman, the last of a line of princes, who will live and die in the traditions of his house."

I regarded him with firmness, and did not refuse to meet his gaze. Then I saw that I had won.

"I am sure it is Don Quixote. I will take the responsibility upon myself."

III.—A PROPOSAL

I NEVER erred on the side of excessive caution, and certainly I was now guilty of an act of great rashness and indiscretion. I had arranged with M. de Marigny that I should meet him at seven o'clock in the evening. You will remember it was the month of January, being New-Year's day, and it was now little more than two in the afternoon. I was so much elated by my success thus far, and so certain of accomplishing all that I intended, that I treated with levity the attempt which had already been made upon me, and looked with contempt upon M. de Montmesnil and his ragged auxiliaries. So far did I carry this feeling that nothing would content me but to return to the tavern I had left, there to dine and spend the afternoon. I had, indeed, the wit to order a private room, and over an excellent bottle of wine passed some hours very pleasantly, indulging in those day-dreams which the events of the morning had set in train. I felt that I had again taken my place in the world, and that a future was now within my reach commensurate with my birth and merits. But I have no desire

that my motives should be mistaken, or that I should be set down either as a designing self-lover or an unworldly enthusiast. I was neither the one nor the other. I should have adopted the course I had taken without the prompting of self-interest or any hope of turning to my own advantage the chain of circumstances in which I had become involved. But I did not close my eyes to the fact that I had probably established a claim upon the gratitude of one who had the power to help me, and I was fully determined, so far as was consistent with honor and rectitude, to profit by the opportunity. That was the whole situation, and under the circumstances my view was not unnatural. I was more than pleased with the result of my interview with M. de Marigny, and with the firmness and dexterity with which I had carried myself. I knew that I had impressed him favorably, and though perhaps he had not accurately gauged my character, or wholly fathomed my motives, his error was one in my favor. I felt that I had gone to work in the right way, and that if I had affected a manner more cavalier and disinterested than altogether reflected my state of mind, my intentions were completely honest, and I had no reason to be ashamed of any word I had spoken. It only remained for me now to exercise the same prudence in madame's presence, and though I never have the same confidence in

dealing with a woman, I did not doubt I should manage to reach dry land in some way.

I was in a very pleasant mood. The generous wine was running with a throb of distant music in my blood, and I had altogether abandoned myself to the hopes it inspired. It was already growing dark, and I had some thought of calling for a light when Antoine, who had himself been an old soldier and was acquainted with me, came in, carrying a candle in either hand.

"There is a—gentleman below stairs inquiring for monsieur."

"A gentleman?"

"Well—a gentleman. I should not advise monsieur to see him."

"Ah! for what reason?"

"An excellent reason; you will not care for his company."

"You know him, then?"

"I have known him for some years. But M. de Montmesnil has not gone up in the world."

"Then it is M. de Montmesnil?"

"A sword, monsieur, with M. de Montmesnil at the end of it. He is a dangerous man."

"That is a temptation I could never resist. I will see him immediately."

"No one ever saw M. de Montmesnil without regret."

"It is time to change that. Show him up-stairs."

I had at once made up my mind that I would see the man, and that for two reasons. I was desirous, if possible, to learn in what manner and with what means he had so far succeeded, and I thought it also possible that I might discover some clew towards the second letter, for I now knew there was another in existence. Knowing his character, I was not surprised that he should endeavor to force himself upon me; but I felt that I had nothing to lose by seeing him, and that, in any case, I might profitably pass half an hour in contemplating the ruin of a gentleman, broken by his own vices and destroyed by his own wayward passions.

As he came in I read his life in his still handsome face—the excessive indulgence, the reckless temper, the desperate contempt of one who had flung his last main and played to no purpose. “Certainly a dangerous man,” I thought, taking the precaution of placing the length of the table between us, though I felt no apprehension.

“M. Dillon?” he said, with a bow.

“You have learned my name correctly, monsieur. You desired to see me?”

“We were near neighbors once.”

“I was not aware of the honor you did me.”

“No; the regulations of the establishment prevented the exchange of courtesies. His majesty provided me with a lodging somewhat longer than

yourself. I found the Bastille draughty and ill-lighted, and, to tell you the truth, I prefer more freedom."

"Personally I have forgotten that episode."

"A man never forgets unmerited injury; a brave man never forgives it."

"You have not paid me this visit, M. de Montmesnil, to discuss a question of morals."

"Pardieu! I do not pose as an authority upon that subject. I was anxious to see a fellow-sufferer."

"I have not made any complaint, monsieur."

"You have learned philosophy in the Rue Vitry."

He had made a mistake, and he saw his blunder at once; he would have given something to withdraw his words.

"You appear to be intimately acquainted with my history," I said.

"Frankly, I have learned something of your movements. I will be open with you, M. Dillon. I have been unjustly accused, tracked like a criminal, and turned out into the world with a load of disappointment on my shoulders. I cannot set it right, but I can make them smart who have injured me. I have it in my power to do this, and at the same time to find considerable profit for myself in the transaction."

"You interest me exceedingly; but how am I concerned in this?"

"I will show you in a moment, though I am sure you see the point at which I wish to arrive. You have suffered; you are stranded like myself; you are trusting to a broken reed. By uniting with me, or, rather, with the powerful friend whose agent I am, you will at once turn the tables on your enemy and secure a handsome fortune."

"No prospect could be more alluring," I said, gravely. "And my enemy?"

"Is it possible you do not know? M. de Saverne's friend, your malignant enemy—the fish-wife Pompadour."

"I have learned the fact for the first time."

"It is none the less the truth. Have I said enough?"

"I am afraid you must be still more explicit."

"Then you refuse to join with me?"

"I must first understand you."

"You understand me perfectly. You are playing a game that can only end in your ruin."

"May I inquire what game you are playing?"

"My own and yours, if you have the wit to sit down with me."

"Is it quite reasonable to ask me to do that before I know in what manner you propose to play, and for what stakes?"

M. de Montmesnil had clearly one fault: he could not keep his temper.

"You are not altogether in the dark," he said, with a sneer.

"You have not yet afforded me much light."

"It is useless to beat about the bush. I know everything."

"What do you know, monsieur?"

"That you carry upon your person a letter that will crush one enemy and will make your fortune and my own. And yet you think you will touch the gratitude of the fish-wife. Pooh! she will squeeze you, and then—but you know the Bastille as well as I do."

"I know more than that," I said, smiling.

He regarded me darkly.

"That M. de Montmesnil has another letter."

"How do you know that?"

"There is a bird in the air that tells curious tales. Would monsieur permit me to play his cards for him?"

"If there is another letter—"

"Then M. de Montmesnil does not consent. Perhaps he will consult his friend?"

"My friend?"

"Yes. M. de—did you tell me his name?"

"I did not tell you his name. I have told you nothing."

"In that we are in perfect agreement. M. de Montmesnil proposes a one-sided confidence."

"You are perfectly aware of all that I would

say. I can see that you have made up your mind, and that you accept the consequences."

"I have always tried to accept the consequences of my conduct without a murmur."

We were both so entirely upon our guard that neither gave the other the slightest advantage, and it was perfectly clear to me that M. de Montmesnil had not the least intention of betraying himself or affording me the slightest information. He perceived that I was equally adroit and determined, and adopted a new tone.

"Perhaps," he said, "you will do me one favor."

"It is not impossible; but I can make no promise."

"That you will not take any step till to-morrow afternoon. I shall then be at liberty to speak more plainly. It is altogether to your advantage."

"I am sure M. de Montmesnil has my interests entirely at heart, but I cannot promise."

"Then you can go to the devil," he said, fairly beside himself with rage, "if he thinks it worth his while to take you in! And I warn you of this: that my hands reach far enough to strike wherever you may hide yourself. You imagine, you blundering Irish beggar, that you are going to make your fortune at my expense. You were never more mistaken in your life; it is the beginning of

your ruin. Go to Poisson if you will, and tell her—tell her everything you please. You will be well matched.”

And with that, snarling and showing his teeth like a disappointed cur, he flung out of the room.

I have known many good men ruined by prosperity; by adversity hardly one. But when a man of vicious nature falls into misfortune, that fosters and develops his vices; and while the sunshine of good-fortune sometimes sweetens and softens, adversity always sours and hardens him. I had much food for reflection in the contemplation of M. de Montmesnil, a gentleman of ancient lineage and good breeding, and now merely a vulgar brawler and stabber. Nor could I avoid comparing his case with my own, and deriving some consolation from the points of contrast; but my natural modesty prevents me from following that train of thought, and I will not pursue it. It is enough to say that at the lowest tide of my fortunes, when one stroke of fate after another overtook me and beat me to the earth, I never cried out upon Providence; I never turned from following truth and honor; I carried my heart high, with invincible hope and courage.

This interview was not without its use; it placed me upon my guard, and determined me to exer-

cise more vigilance than I had previously used ; for I now came to the conclusion that M. de Montmesnil was a very dangerous man, who would stop at no crime to successfully carry out his purpose. It was as well that I did this, for otherwise my story and life had ended at the door of Antoine's tavern.

Before going out to keep my appointment with M. de Marigny I blew out the candle, and, drawing the blind, looked up and down the street. It was a fine, clear night, with a bright glitter of stars, and as soon as my eyes had got rid of the glare of the candle-light I caught sight of the glint of a steel blade at the angle of the wall opposite. That first attracted my attention, and then I saw three dark forms clustered together in the depth of the shadows and another a little distance away.

"The trap will not spring to-night," I thought, as I made my way down-stairs.

There was a door at the rear opening on a garden where I had been used to sit during one happy summer—Gabrielle's summer—and I could find my way without difficulty. Antoine himself let me out, though I said nothing to him regarding my motive for leaving his house in this unusual way. But I am sure he did not doubt I had a good reason for my secrecy. He was an excellent host, and discretion itself.

“Tell M. de Montmesnil,” I said, with my hand on the gate, “when he inquires for me, as he will shortly, that he has failed twice. The third time will be my turn. Do not forget my message.”

IV.—THE MISTRESS OF FRANCE

WHEN I was ushered into madame's cabinet I was left for some time completely alone. For a good while I stood very stupidly, feeling completely out of place in the magnificence that surrounded me, but by-and-by I began to draw confidence from remembering the ancient splendor of my own family, and the fact that birth and courage give a man place even in the courts of kings. This latter thought has often been of great service to me, and never more than at this juncture, when I needed all the wit and address of which I was master. It was quite possible that I might not gain madame's good-will and disarm her suspicions as readily as I had succeeded with M. de Marigny; and the story I had to tell was of a character so extraordinary that I might not be able to secure her belief. I never for one moment attached any weight to Montmesnil's assertion that she had been my enemy; on the other hand, I had substantial reason for believing that it was to her good offices that I owed my release from imprisonment, though it was quite possible even then she had never heard my name. M. de Saverne

had been her enemy, and had constantly intrigued against her. It was not, however, likely that she would give me credit for the high and disinterested motives which influenced my conduct. It was more to the point if I could induce her to believe that the letter had come honestly into my hands, and that I had no part or share in the conspiracy of which she was apparently the object and victim. She might take one of two courses—either altogether remove me from her path as one who had witnessed her discomfiture, or make me her friend and united to her interests under the weight of gratitude. I admit that I was beginning to dread the result, and for the first time I fully realized the boldness of the design I had undertaken to carry out as the moment approached when I was to put it into operation.

I had walked down to the end of the room, which was brilliantly lighted, and was standing before the portrait of a lady that stood upon an easel—a portrait fresh from the master's brush and instinct with the graces of form and color and joyous life. By degrees I became rapt in the contemplation of such loveliness—for the beauty of a woman always inspired me like wine—when I was again brought back to life by the sound of a footstep and the rustle of a silken garment. I turned round abruptly and saw the living presentment of the picture, but a thousand

times more beautiful, and with an air of imperious command in place of that arch and joyous coquetry that had so appealed to me from the canvas.

I bowed, and did not speak. She did not even incline her head, but stood regarding me with a look in which I thought I read both curiosity and scorn. Then, with a movement which I cannot describe, but intended, as I thought, to impress the vast distance between us, she came almost down the length of the room, and stood with her hand resting on a curious inlaid table. Her action was not natural; it was that of a consummate actress, perfect in her part; and, indeed, throughout the whole interview her manner conveyed the same impression.

There are men who say Madame de Pompadour was not beautiful. I am as able as any man in France to form a correct judgment on a woman's beauty, having a natural gift in that way, and I say that this is a pure calumny, due either to enmity or want of knowledge. And behind that beauty there was a mind strong and masterful, a swift and clear judgment and admirable *finesse* , and a power of expression which gave to every word a proper and fitting emphasis—a woman, perhaps, not altogether to my own taste, being strong and brilliant rather than sweet and lovable, but a woman far beyond the common.

She stood regarding me; as I say, her haughty eyes taking me in from head to foot. Then she spoke slowly.

"What have you to say? I am not afraid of you."

"Madame la Duchesse has no reason to fear me. I am powerless to injure her."

"I am glad you recognize that. Your name?"

"Dillon, madame; Anthony Dillon, a poor soldier of fortune."

"Dillon?" she said, thoughtfully.

"Yes, madame, at one time captain in Clare's Regiment, now without occupation."

"Ah! I begin to remember. There was a woman—I saw her—she was very beautiful."

I bowed silently.

"And M. de Saverne thought he would build upon her beauty. I remember everything. You fought him in his own house, in presence of M. la Bel, and nearly killed him; after that you went to the Bastille. It was a scene for the stage—for M. de Voltaire. The woman was your wife or mistress?"

"The daughter, madame, of a noble gentleman whose heart was broken—neither my mistress nor my wife."

"But you loved her?"

The curiosity of the woman showed itself in the question. But, at the same time, I felt this interrogation was not without an object.

"I have endeavored to forget the past," I answered, gravely. "She is dead, madame."

"It is well. There are few women worth remembering so long. You are aware that it was to me you owed your liberty?"

"I had some reason to believe as much, but I did not know. I am now prepared to show my gratitude."

"With me you need not use fine words, monsieur; I have long since ceased to believe in gratitude. It is self-interest that moves men. I am prepared to hear you."

"I am a simple soldier," I said, now feeling perfect command over myself, "and unaccustomed to breathe the air of courts. I do not know the fashion that prevails, or the code that others follow; but I do know what is required from a gentleman, and the demands that faith and honor make upon him. It is true I am poor, but, madame, I am proud as any Rohan or Condé—too proud to disgrace the traditions of my illustrious house. It was my fortune, whether good or evil I do not know, and hardly care, to stumble by the merest accident upon a letter written by yourself—whether trivial or important it is not for me to determine. There was only one thing left me as a gentleman—to place it in your hands, and in yours alone, without delay or failure. Having done that, I have done everything."

With that I advanced half a dozen steps and laid the envelope on the table before her. I saw the blood rise swiftly in her forehead and the bright sparkle to her eyes, but she controlled herself and did not move. She regarded me for a good while with flashing eyes, and then slowly, almost indifferently, took up the paper in her hand. She examined the broken seal, and then in perfect silence drew the letter from the envelope. There was a look of supercilious interest on her face which did not deceive me as she seemed to read the words and examine the signature. Then she slowly tore the sheet into a thousand fragments, and, going over to the fire, threw the pieces into the living flame, and watched them shrivel into dust. All this was done without a word, but with the same haughty, contemptuous smile; but I noticed that her hands trembled.

Then she turned to me with a swift, searching look.

"You have a good memory?"

"A soldier's memory, madame."

"I do not understand you."

From her tone I perceived Madame la Duchesse was in no humor to permit me to play upon words.

"I remember my good, I forget my ill, fortune."

"And what do you call this?"

"If I have rendered you a service, the best fortune in the world."

"Words! words! You know the contents of the letter I have destroyed. Perhaps you have a copy?"

"Madame!"

It was now my turn to show my feelings, and even the presence of Madame de Pompadour did not restrain me from exhibiting the irritation I justly felt at this gross imputation on my character.

"You do not ask me to believe—"

"I ask you to believe nothing. I state the truth."

"Then begin at the beginning and let me hear the truth."

She spoke with undisguised contempt, and it was abundantly clear to my mind that she considered I was playing a part entirely theatrical, and that I had still something behind. But I quickly mastered my momentary anger, and, with perfect command over myself, simply and quietly told the whole story, only suppressing the name of M. de Montmesnil. As I went on in my narration, picturing my forlorn condition and my poverty, the accidental meeting and discovery, even the temptation to read the letter which I had faced successfully—for I did not omit this—I could see that I awakened her interest, and perhaps, finally, her sympathy. At any rate, when I had finished, I had no doubt that she believed every word I

had spoken. Never had I used the excellent gift of narration, with which I was born, to more advantage, and in the end I found myself trembling with the emotions I had awakened in myself. While I was speaking she had sat down, and was watching me attentively, with her head resting upon her hand.

"M. de Marigny was right," she said, after a pause; "I hope they are all well in La Mancha?"

"I am not acquainted with the district, madame," I said, wondering at her words.

"No matter. I thought you were dead and buried. Cervantes was wrong."

"I am sure he was very much mistaken. It is a pure calumny."

She laughed very frankly at my serious air, though I could not see the occasion for her amusement, unless she was indulging in some pleasantry at my expense; but presently she grew grave again.

"I will not disguise," she said, "that you have done me a great service—this letter was of some importance; its loss would have involved serious consequences. We who live in courts naturally make enemies—it is part of the price we pay for greatness. Ah! I have set my foot on the necks of a good many. Here my enemies have worked more carefully than usual, and as yet I cannot tell with what tools. But I shall, and then—

Ah! you are a man, and do not understand—a brave man—I think a good one.”

“Hardly better than middling, madame.”

“Even that is too good for the world we live in. Where was I? Ah! the little conspiracy. They bribed my waiting-woman, who disappeared yesterday—probably she whom **you** met in the Rue Vitry. Of course there was a man; there is always a man when a woman goes wrong, but I have not found him—yet. And the others behind who made use of these tools, I shall yet discover them all.”

“In the meantime what of the other letter, madame?”

“It has disappeared. My enemies may make what use of it they can.”

“It is of some importance?”

“I should prefer to have it in my own hands, but it has lost a good deal of its value within this last quarter of an hour. It was merely the key of which I have now destroyed the cipher.”

“Still—”

“Ah! you are ambitious, M. Dillon.”

“I am ambitious to serve you, madame.”

“You must take care. I may help you; I may also ruin you.”

“I have too often faced ruin to fear its whisper.”

“I find you charming, M. Dillon. M. de Marny did not do you justice.”

"I should prefer you found me serviceable."

"And you think you can discover this letter?"

"I can at least try."

"Should you succeed in that—"

"Pardon me, madame was about to promise something. I know it will sound presumptuous, but I speak humbly and with a single mind. I should prefer to act in this matter not for the sake of favor or reward, but altogether on account of madame's beautiful eyes."

Everything depends on how a speech is spoken. The words as I have written them appear audacious in the extreme, but as they were spoken simply and naturally under the impulse of the moment they merely conveyed the simple fact to which no woman could take exception. For a woman is always a woman, and there never yet was a woman who could resist a tribute to her beauty when she believed it to be sincere.

Madame burst into laughter, and she had not yet finished when M. de Marigny came into the room, looking surprised at this outburst.

"M. Dillon has proved amusing," he said.

"After his majesty," she said, still smiling, "there is only one gentleman in France. You will bring M. Dillon to see me on Tuesday, when I hope to hear the rest of his history. In the meantime I hope he will permit me to defray those charges he has incurred in his desire to serve me."

It was a great temptation—the greatest I had undergone for many a day. My fingers itched at the sight of the gold, for my pockets yawned with emptiness; but I mastered the impulse after a little hesitation, and refused the gift in the best language I could command. Perhaps it was not done very gracefully—it certainly was not done without an effort—but in the end I felt a glow of pride and satisfaction which I cannot easily describe. Had I calculated on the effect my refusal would produce—and I do not think that entered into my thoughts at the moment—I could not have been better satisfied. It completed my character as a gentleman, and set the seal upon my honor and sincerity.

As we passed out M. de Marigny laid his hand upon my arm.

“You carry it too far,” he said; “it will not do.”

“Perhaps monsieur will explain.”

“I will explain by a question. Can you pay for your supper?”

“Frankly, I am unable; but I was never ashamed to borrow from a gentleman. That is different.”

“In the long-run it is frequently the same. If you will permit me to lend you a small sum—”

“There is no reason why I should refuse.”

- In this case I did not, and, I am happy to say, repaid him in less than a month.

V.—AS CHANCE BEFALLS

IT was fate—the fate that waits upon the high heart and adventurous spirit, and leads to fortune by chance and accident rather than design. I cannot tell how it happened or what inspired the thought, but I felt certain I should recover the second letter. I had no clew to guide me further than that M. de Montmesnil afforded me, but when I left the cabinet of Madame de Pompadour I was convinced that I should return successful. This mood carried with it a strange feeling of elation to which I had long been a stranger; my mind had grown alert, active, and strenuous, with a new elasticity as of youth. The first draught of success after my long retirement and enforced inactivity had intoxicated me like wine; the frost of winter had given way to the generous ardor of the spring.

I was entirely satisfied with my interview. I had no doubt I had affected madame favorably, and impressed her with my honesty and candor. Nor had I any doubt that I had already rendered her a service far greater than she would have had me suppose, for her manner had not been lost

upon me, and I knew that an actress so accomplished was not likely to reveal her mind to a stranger like myself. I own I was glad that she had not. I felt that it was a dangerous privilege to share a secret with Madame de Pompadour, and I had not the least desire that she should feel I had any claim or hold upon her. I was, in truth, no designing adventurer, and I did not wish her to suppose that I aspired to enact that character. You will see my shrewd mother-wit never forsook me in my furthest extravagance; I never lost sight of the end I had in view, and played my cards with prudence and caution.

I had now settled upon the plan I intended to adopt, if, indeed, that can be called a plan which was merely the resolution that I formed almost in a moment and without any premeditation. I should return to the Rue Vitry and keep a close watch upon the house there, regarding which I had fortunately never said a word nor hinted any suspicion. I had no doubt that this was the meeting-place of the conspirators, and that for reasons of secrecy and safety they had chosen this obscure and desolate place of rendezvous. Certainly no spot was more suitable for their purpose, and had it not been for the lucky chance which had befallen me there is no doubt they would have entirely escaped observation and discovery. Whether they had now forsaken the Rue

Vitry in alarm I did not know, but I thought it likely that such was not the case. At all events, the course I proposed was worth trying, and I had no scruples regarding my dealings with the scoundrels who made war upon a woman by such means as they had adopted. I felt that I had my fortune in my hands; I knew there was danger, and to all this there was added an element of surprise and mystery which proved perfectly irresistible. M. de Montmesnil I knew; the hands and the mind behind M. de Montmesnil I did not know, and I was determined to discover.

I do not affirm that I returned to the Rue Vitry with pleasure; but when I again found myself occupying my old lodging it was with a very different feeling from that which formerly possessed me. I had awakened from the nightmare of poverty and wretchedness in which I had been so long involved, and could now survey my surroundings with that sympathetic humor which is the gift of so many of my countrymen. There was this in addition: that I was now better clad, better fed, and had money in my pocket; and there is no doubt that these things materially alter our views of life.

But I had also an object to attain, and about this I set immediately. My point of observation was, for the most part, a little café opposite; but

for some time I saw and heard nothing. The house stood apparently deserted and tenantless, the lower windows barred on the outside and shuttered on the inside, and the upper darkened by dust and festooned by cobwebs. I was careful not to make any direct inquiry which might awaken curiosity and excite suspicion; but the answers to such questions as I put were entirely satisfactory. Lights had been observed in the house, and on several occasions the door had been seen open, but always at night, and then only for a minute or two. My questions were necessarily casual and guarded, and I could not pointedly inquire regarding the appearance and description of the man who had been seen upon the steps. I do not think, however, I should have learned much on this head to my purpose, as curiosity is not strong in the Rue Vitry in the absence of something striking and marvellous beyond the common. However, it was eminently satisfactory to me to know that the house was still used as a place of meeting, and that there was a certain regularity in the visits. There was also another matter which gave me confidence that I was right in my conjectures. After the great fall of snow which we had had on the previous Thursday the frost had continued, without intermission, keen and hard. I had examined the half-dozen steps which led to the house,

and had become convinced that at least three several visitors had entered and left more than once, for the footsteps were plainly to be seen on the hard, crisp snow. I had also found a gold stud upon the door-step, which must have been dropped the night before, for it was very conspicuous where it lay, and must have been seen by almost the first early passer-by. There was nothing in its workmanship to indicate the owner, but it was of some value, and must have belonged to a person of condition. This was not, in my eyes, a trivial circumstance, but pointed unmistakably to the fact that it was probably here that M. de Montmesnil met his employers. Of course, the ornament might have belonged to that gentleman himself; but I thought this was hardly probable.

The first night passed, and I saw nothing. I remained in the café till the doors were closed, and then, being turned out into the street, hung about the dark corners and angles till an advanced hour in the morning. Nothing, however, happened that attracted my attention. The windows did not show the faintest ray of light, and the door certainly had not been opened. I began to fear that having, perhaps, been warned by my unlooked-for interference, the conspirators had sought some other hiding-place, or that there might be an entrance from the rear, of which I had no knowledge.

If that was the case I was merely losing my time, but my obstinate tenacity of purpose, with which I have always found it vain to reason, prevented my turning aside. I determined that my first disappointment, which, I own, damped me a little, should not divert me from the course that I had marked out, for I still, in some way, seemed to feel that I held the end of the skein in my hand.

The second evening passed with the same result. Though I had watched with lynx-eyed vigilance during the day, and up till ten o'clock, I had seen absolutely nothing. There had been no sign of life or movement in the house. At this hour I again took up my position at the corner of the street, a point from which I had a complete view of the doorway; and here, sheltered a little from the thin, keen wind that had sprung up, I waited and watched with the most stoical patience. So much depended upon my success that I was not to be diverted or turned aside by inconvenience or hardship, and though I felt the cold keenly I kept up my spirits as well as I could. After standing here for about an hour, and having grown quite chill and numb, I made up my mind to walk to the other end of the street. When I came opposite the house, walking slowly on the other side, I halted involuntarily, and stood gazing with all my eyes. I was at length about to be rewarded for my patience.

Though some care had evidently been taken to prevent it, a thin ray of light, very faint and hardly perceptible, shone through one of the upper windows, where the curtain had fallen a little. But to my imagination it shone like a star; it glowed like the dawn; the new day was breaking. I did not hesitate a moment. I walked on rapidly, crossed the street lower down, and then returned upon the other side till I reached the house. The great door seemed to be firmly closed, and everything was silent. I do not know what prompted me, but I mounted the steps and placed my hand upon the iron-studded frame. To my surprise and inexpressible delight it gave a little, and I found that it had not been thoroughly secured.

As I pushed it open slowly and with caution it creaked ominously on the rusty hinges, and I was quite prepared to hear myself challenged; but apparently the sound had escaped observation. I entered and closed the door after me, finding myself in the most absolute darkness, a darkness that I could almost feel. Here I hesitated, not knowing which way to turn, and quite unable to strike a light, for I felt that everything depended on my caution and secrecy. I had the sense of a vast space round me—indeed, the house was very large—and for some minutes I stood like one lost in a desert. The light that I had seen

outside had come from the third story, and I thought it very likely that the lower part of the house was entirely unoccupied. That being the case, I had now to find the stair, and, moving cautiously, with one hand upon the wall, I felt my way for a considerable distance. Once I tripped over some object that lay upon the floor, and the noise that I made as I stumbled seemed to awaken a thousand echoes that no one living in the house could fail to hear. I had taken the precaution to draw my sword, and I stood there, hardly daring to breathe, with my back to the wall. But the sounds died away, and I could hear no answering movement. After waiting some time I again continued to feel my way, till finally my progress was stopped by what seemed a door at the end of a narrow passage. I could form no idea of my position, nor find any means of going farther in that direction. I accordingly retraced my steps by the same means as I had before adopted, and once more reached the street-door by which I had entered. Then I felt my way round the farther side, and in the end found myself, so far as I could judge, in the same narrow passage as before. I immediately came to the conclusion that the staircase was in the centre of the hall round which I had been groping, and returned once more to the street-door. Taking that as my point of departure, I walked in as

straight a line as I could measure in the darkness—it is not an easy thing to do—and by the merest good-luck laid my hand upon the balustrade as I was about to pass it.

Once my feet were upon the staircase I experienced no difficulty, though the noise I made as I ascended alarmed myself. Here I set my foot in a hole where the wood was broken, and there a loose board gave way under me. But I took my time and moved slowly. I gained the first landing and then the second without adventure or mishap. At this point the darkness became less intense, and as I ascended I could see the balustrade on the third story, and a door open with a steady light behind it. It was now that I felt that I must exercise all the vigilance and caution I possessed. I drew one foot slowly after another, and at length gained the top step. Here I could see quite plainly. The landing was very spacious and roomy, with a great many doors leading off it. Two of these doors lay open, one looking upon the back of the house and one upon the front, and both were lighted. I stood a good while listening for a sound to guide me, and then I moved noiselessly towards that nearest me.

I was hardly surprised. I had found M. de Montmesnil at home. Standing in the obscurity of the landing I watched him for some time with

a feeling of intense satisfaction. This was clearly where he dined and supped, for a fire was burning on the hearth where he had evidently prepared his own meal, and the remains of his supper lay upon the table. This table and half a dozen high-backed chairs made up the entire furniture, except two or three cooking utensils which lay upon the hearth. M. de Montmesnil had apparently supped, and was now finishing the bottle of wine which stood at his elbow; but he was clearly in an unpleasant humor and the subject of moody thoughts. "It might not improve his temper to see his visitor," I thought, as I stole quietly to the other door, and pushed it still farther open, till I had a good view of the room. Here I experienced some sense of surprise, for the lofty apartment was well, even splendidly, furnished, and with evident taste. The walls were hung with excellent tapestry, the windows were richly curtained, and a brass lamp of very fine workmanship lighted the room with a mellow and softened glow. But what most attracted my attention was the ebony table that stood in the centre with a number of papers upon it and a pair of gloves that clearly belonged to a woman. It was no doubt here that M. de Montmesnil passed his hours of leisure, and here, if still in his custody, was the letter that I sought. But what course should I now take? What means should I now adopt? I was neither

a spy nor a thief, and though I might be justified under the circumstances, I felt that I could not proceed by stratagem and stealth. And yet to use the strong hand and compel the rogue to disgorge his spoil—I own it seemed at the moment very like robbing with violence. But I felt that was my duty; he deserved no consideration; I was merely the instrument of justice.

Well, I was a long time in making up my mind, and never made it up, after all—so far, at least, as either of these two courses were concerned. While I still stood hesitating I heard the sound below stairs as of a door being closed, but the noise was not very loud and I might have been mistaken. I held my breath to listen, and then heard quite distinctly the sound of footsteps upon the stair, every moment coming nearer and nearer. Then I heard M. de Montmesnil moving in the room, where he had also evidently been alarmed. I had not an instant to lose if I wished to avoid discovery. Indeed, there was only one course open to me, for I knew that in another moment M. de Montmesnil would be upon the corridor. I therefore stepped over the threshold into the room, and hastily looked round me for some place in which to conceal myself. At the farther end was a heavy curtain concealing a window, and I felt that there could be no place more admirably suited for my purpose. In less time

than it takes me to write the words I had drawn the folds around me, and stood quite hidden, with my back against the framework and my naked sword ready to use in my hand. I own my heart was throbbing very tumultuously, for the great, dreary house, so full of emptiness, the awful silence, broken only by the fall of the footsteps echoing on the staircase, the dangerous nature of my errand, and my remoteness from all assistance, began to have an effect upon my nerves. It was not fear, however, but expectation, for I was not in the least degree afraid.

There was one great advantage about my hiding-place: I could see everything that took place in the room without the least likelihood of discovery myself. I could even hear every sound upon the landing without, and could easily guess what was happening there. Meanwhile the footsteps were coming nearer and nearer, and M. de Montmesnil was standing at the head of the staircase with the lighted candle in his hand. I knew that he was leaning over the balustrade, peering down into the darkness. Then I heard his voice.

"In the devil's name, who is there?"

I could not hear the answer, but only the broken, indistinct sound of a voice in reply, and then M. de Montmesnil burst into a fit of laughter. It was not a pleasant laugh, but full of reckless bitterness. However, I now knew that he had only

a single visitor. Then I heard both voices quite distinctly.

"You are mad; the door was lying open. You will ruin everything."

"Then you should have come last night, as you promised, M. l'Abbé. But I know the value of a churchman's promises."

"Ah! you have a bad tongue, Montmesnil. 'Tis living so much alone, I suppose; but we will mend that presently. Let us get to business."

"There is not much business to do now," Montmesnil answered, bitterly, throwing open the door as he spoke and entering the room. "You have come the day after the fair, M. l'Abbé."

"You do not mean to tell me you have failed again?"

"I will tell you everything if you give me time. Do you think that I have not as much in this venture as yourself, and that I am not quite as anxious to succeed? If you had lived as long among the rats in the Rue Vitry you could easily answer that question. Sit down and make yourself at home."

He seated himself with his back towards me, and looked up at his companion with a mocking and cynical smile as he pointed to the vacant seat. The other hesitated for a moment, standing looking round the room with his hands behind his back, and then obeyed without a word.

"M. l'Abbé de Bernis is not a daring conspirator," Montmesnil said, with a sneer, perhaps reading his visitor's mind.

"I have not shown much fear in visiting you three times, M. de Montmesnil."

I thought the face of the priest was familiar to me, but I recognized him now, and in the creature of M. d'Argenson, the avowed and subtle enemy of Madame de Pompadour, I held the key to the mystery and the heart of the conspiracy. Certainly I was swimming in deep waters. It was not merely the sword or secret stab of M. de Montmesnil that I had to fear, but the baffled vengeance and hostility of perhaps the ablest man in France since the days of Richelieu. M. de Montmesnil had brought me to M. l'Abbé, and he in turn had conducted me into the secret presence of the late minister of war, M. d'Argenson. And I had only myself to rely upon, and the capricious favor of a woman; the pipkin was among the iron pots with a vengeance. Still, I would not have gone back an inch now for the king himself, and as I watched the faces of the two men through the curtain I smiled to think that, for the moment at any rate, I held them both in the hollow of my hand.

The abbé was smooth and smiling, with the sidelong, apostolic look. His lips were thin, and his eyes close together. M. de Montmesnil evidently tried him a good deal, but he gave no ex-

pression to his vexation except by drumming with his fingers upon the table. Then he spoke slowly.

"I thought you had succeeded."

"The hand that takes the chestnuts out of the fire has to be careful, M. l'Abbé; he who eats them needs not be so particular. You have run no risk so far, but it is not so with me. I also thought we had succeeded. We had laid our plans in such a way that I thought we could not fail. I had Lié under my thumb, and his sister was anxious to save him—Pompadour's favorite woman, as you know. She brought me the first letter—it is here, and I will show it you by-and-by—and she had almost placed the second in my hands; it was even lying at my feet."

"Then why—"

"Oh! the act of God and the blundering fool who nearly killed Saverne three years ago. I will tell you how it happened. She came here with the letter, as we had arranged, but Lié was late, and in the meantime something occurred. The woman was over-dressed for the Rue Vitry, and when we arrived had been ill-used and robbed. We were not in time; the letter had walked off."

"Into whose hands did it fall?"

"A blustering Irish beggar whose long sword has been rusting next door for the last five or six months."

"Then you discovered that?"

"He took all the means in his power to let me know."

"You might have—" said the abbé, purring softly.

"I did, and failed. It was a near thing, but it failed."

"An Irish adventurer—ah! He has his price."

"It is too late."

"Why?"

"Because the tattered ruffian was not a fool. The letter is now in the fish-wife's hands. I have no doubt he made a very good bargain."

"It is quite possible. The letter was of great value—the Austrian letter."

"It was altogether your own fault. If you had come in time—"

"It is unnecessary to indulge in recriminations. The first letter will still be useful."

"I shall expect to be paid the terms we agreed upon, at any rate," said Montmesnil, rising to his feet and lifting a small box that lay near him. "You will find it here, and I have, at all events, fulfilled our compact."

The abbé took the box from his hands, and, again sitting down at the table, opened it, and proceeded eagerly to examine the contents. For some time neither of them spoke a word, and I could not see their faces, as the backs of both were turned towards me. But I could hear the

rustle of the paper, and at length a subdued, eager cry from the abbé.

"Ah," he said, "it is exactly as M. d'Ar—as we had suspected—exactly, in every particular. She is cunning, and perhaps thinks she will throw us off the scent. We shall see, madame, we shall see. A week hence, and I know who will be master in France."

He had spread the letter out on the table before him, and M. de Montmesnil was leaning over his shoulder looking on. Both were utterly absorbed in the words before them, and were so silent that I could hear their breathing where I stood. It was at this point that I suddenly made up my mind. Until then I had formed no plan—I had hardly thought of what course I should take; but now I was resolved in a moment.

Drawing back the curtain, I stepped noiselessly into the room, holding my breath as I did so. There was still the distance of a dozen paces between us, and the least noise would probably be fatal to my purpose. It was a fortunate thing for me that they were both so entirely absorbed in their work that I had come almost within reach before a loose board creaked under my feet. The abbé gave a little start and looked round nervously. You can picture the look upon his face when his eyes met mine. They opened wide in astonishment and fear, and his jaws dropped.

He gave a little, feeble cry, and half rose from his seat, with the open letter shaking in his hand. Even M. de Montmesnil was for the moment paralyzed by surprise at the sudden apparition, but before either of them could recover himself I had sprung forward and wrenched the paper from the abbé's hand.

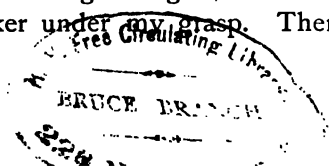
"Keep back, gentlemen!" I cried; "my sword is not so rusty as you think. This is what I have come to find."

M. de Montmesnil, with a sudden oath, kicked back his chair, sprang to his feet, and drew his sword with a flourish. But I think the churchman was the first to recover his full presence of mind. With an adroit movement, and before I knew what he intended, he suddenly extinguished the lamp and left us completely in the darkness. For the space of nearly a minute there was not a sound in the room, and then I made a slight movement. It had nearly been my last, for Montmesnil's sword only escaped my breast by a hair's-breadth and tore a long rent in my vest. I lunged in return, but only struck the empty air, and nearly overbalanced myself in my attempt. I knew that my life now hung on the turn of a straw, and that it was quite upon the cards that I should never leave this room alive. I had now no idea in what direction the door lay, and there was nothing whatever to guide me. Another

movement like my last and I should probably never move again. I knew my enemy was waiting and watching, listening with all his ears, his eyes gleaming, his lips quivering, and his sword ready to strike me once and for all. Perhaps he stood at my elbow, perhaps a few feet away; once I thought I could feel his breath upon my cheek. But that was merely fancy, for I had no doubt he was waiting to tire out my patience, that I might betray my position by the noise I made. I cannot tell how long I stood in this way perfectly motionless, my mouth parched with excitement and my eyes aching with the strain of endeavoring to pierce the awful darkness. It may have been only minutes, but it seemed like hours—hours of grim expectancy. Then I felt whatever happened I must find the door. Time was precious, for M. de Montmesnil could evidently afford to wait, and perhaps had assistance at hand. But I had none, and waiting could not improve my position.

I moved cautiously, one step at a time, feeling for the wall with my left hand, and my sword drawn back in my right. Then I heard a noise in front of me, and, turning a little to the right, tripped over a chair or a stool, and went headlong to the floor. My hand struck the wall as I went down, and in an instant I had crept close up to it, while a moment after I heard a stealthy

footstep that almost brushed me as it passed. I had some thought of throwing myself upon my opponent, but I feared that I might miss him, and the slightest mistake would entail serious consequences. Raising myself up, I continued to feel along the wall, though my progress was necessarily very slow, and my hand at length rested upon the frame of the door. With the utmost eagerness I reached for the handle; if I succeeded in this I felt that I was safe. At first I could not find it at all; perhaps I was too much excited. But at length, to my great joy, I discovered it, and no longer taking the precaution to observe the same profound silence, I threw the door open with considerable violence. As I did so a hand struck me upon the face, and I felt a sharp twinge of pain in my side. The next moment my unseen antagonist and myself were locked in each other's arms, and were swaying to and fro in a deadly grip in the blind darkness of the corridor. I heard him now for the first time calling for a light, but I had got my right hand well among the muscles of his throat, and he was soon unable to articulate. I clung there like a vise, and never let go my hold. Once we fell upon the floor together, rolling over and over one another, and rising at the same moment to our feet. But I had the more lasting strength; I felt that he was getting weaker under my grasp. Then, bracing



myself to one colossal effort, I raised myself to my full height, and flung him forward and from me with all my strength. There was a sudden crash of breaking wood, a ringing cry of fear, a dull, heavy thud twenty feet below—and silence—the silence of death. I waited and listened, but the silence still continued. I knew now that M. l'Abbé and I were alone.

The fire was still burning, though very feebly, in the room at the back, and it was not long before I had lighted a candle. I saw then what had occurred. The balustrade had given way, and M. de Montmesnil was lying upon the stone floor below. I ran down to see if he were still alive, but the fall had evidently broken his neck, and he was quite dead. I cannot say that I was sorry—he was a bad man, and had done much mischief in his time, but I wished some other hand had dealt the blow that killed him. But I had at that time no inclination or opportunity to moralize; I only desired to say one word to M. l'Abbé, and quit the Rue Vitry forever.

I found him frightened almost out of his senses, but I speedily reassured him.

"M. l'Abbé," I said, "I can afford to be generous, and I will. I have not recognized you, and therefore cannot remember you. On your part you have never seen me before, nor ever heard my name. We are strangers, and therefore friends.

But should you ever move a hand against me, this night's work will rise up in testimony and destroy you utterly. Never forget that."

He muttered some sort of feeble protestation, and I left him where I had found him. But I have another story to tell of M. l'Abbé de Bernis.

This was the best night's work I had ever done, and I found Madame de Pompadour generous to the last degree. Once down, it is hard to rise; but, having risen, it is easy to continue the career of fortune. From that hour prosperity never turned its back upon me, and I have met success with the same bold heart and honest courage as I did adversity. In good report and bad, in fair weather and fine, I have placed my feet on the broad stone of honor, and have followed no other light and listened to no other voices than those of truth and virtue.

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